However, having signed up for the next experience of a lifetime, how many participants actually read the health disclaimers? If we read the small print, are we always truthful about our own health?

A 34-year-old pilot presented after dislocating his shoulder at "AirKix™" (www.airkix.com).

The pilot had assumed the freefall position, but very soon his shoulder jerked out of position. Recognising a problem, he signalled to be removed from the simulator and was brought to the emergency department.

During his assessment, it became apparent that he had dislocated his shoulder on two previous occasions, the most recent being 2 years ago.

After an uncomplicated reduction of his right anterior shoulder dislocation, he was discharged.

The literature contains only one letter, published in October 1995, about shoulder injuries associated with skydiving.¹

The health and safety information provided by Airkix™ states contraindications to participation; this includes "You have not previously suffered from a dislocated shoulder".

I contacted the patient to ask whether he had read and signed the health disclaimer. He admitted that he had ignored the contraindication to take part, as he thought his shoulder would be OK. As a professional pilot, he had for many years refused to skydive despite descriptions by friends of a truly fantastic experience. The indoor Airkix skydive seemed a safer alternative.

The patient took part, fully aware of the risks and his own medical history.

I suppose the patient was lucky that the Airkix environment is indoor, well supervised and actually quite safe. A real skydive could have had an altogether different outcome.

So for all those looking for that extra buzz of adrenaline, please remember that the safety restrictions are there for a reason and yes, they do apply to you.

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Should emergency medical technicians be considered for the role of the emergency care practitioner?

We enjoyed a recent discussion in this journal about the evaluation of the role of the emergency care practitioner (ECP).^{1,2} In the UK, 77% of ECPs are paramedics and most of the remainder are nurses,² although studies report them as a homogeneous group. We also find differences within ECPs interesting, particularly as ECPs in London have also been recruited from emergency medical technicians (EMTs).

In the London pilot, 11 EMTs undertook the same ECP diploma-level education as

paramedic recruits, with EMTs also needing to complete paramedic training before qualifying as ECPs. We examined their performance in the period when they were practising autonomously as ECPs, but before their paramedic training.

Educational performance of EMTs was similar to that of a group of paramedic ECPs matched by operating area and length of time as ECPs—physical assessment average marks 59.8% v 57.3% and clinical decision making average marks by Objective Structured Clinical Examination 59.9% v 60.6% (EMTs v paramedics, respectively).

Practice data for 1086 EMT-ECP and 973 paramedic-ECP-attended patients showed differences in care pathway use, defined as treat and leave (30.8% v 22.5%), treated and referred (11.1% v 12.3%), conveyed, not emergency department (3.5% v 5.8%) and conveyed to the emergency department (54.6% v 59.4%); $\chi^2 = 21.42$, $df = 3$, $p = 0.001$. Without outcome data, the interpretation of findings is limited and the higher treat and leave rate among EMT-ECPs needs further investigation. However, the clinical educational results offer some reassurance about the similarity of competence of EMT-ECPs and paramedic ECPs.

These data raise two issues:

- differences in performance within the ECP group may be important to consider in future studies;
- recruitment from a variety of staff is promoted in the national ambulance review.³ As long as professional registration is embedded in the educational programme, and clinical governance is robust, the possibility of access to the ECP role for EMTs, and potentially for others, is open.

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Transition to the Foundation Programme: does it affect the numbers of patients seen by SHOs?

We read with interest the article by Kilroy and Southward¹ on their experiences of the Foundation Programme. The Mersey Deanery was a pilot site for the Foundation Programme, with the first Foundation Year 2 (FY2) doctors appointed in 2004. Originally our department employed 20 senior house officers (SHOs). In August 2004, half of these became FY2 posts. From August 2004 to July 2005, we maintained a 50:50 split between traditional 6-month posts and 4-month FY2 posts. This gave our department a unique opportunity to study the effect of the transition to the Foundation Programme on workload.

Data were obtained from the hospital information technology system on the number of patients seen by all SHOs during the year. The mean number of patients seen by each set of doctors was compared. Variations over time during the posts were also analysed. Statistical analysis with the unpaired t test was carried out using SPSS V.13.

The department had 80 981 attendances from August 2004 to July 2005, of which 38 416 patients were seen by SHOs. FY2 and 6-month doctors saw 18 928 and 19 488 patients, respectively. At the end of their placements, there were no marked differences between the mean numbers of patients seen by the two types of SHOs. Over the course of the year, FY2 doctors saw a mean of 159 patients per month, whereas 6-month doctors saw 162 patients per month. The stem and leaf plot (fig 1) shows that the means for the number of patients seen are almost identical. Table 1 shows the wide range for the mean number of patients seen during the course of the year, which was greater for those in the 6-month posts. A small number of FY2 doctors saw considerably more patients than their colleagues. No overall differences were identified between the two types of placement. For those doctors in 6-month posts, the numbers of patients seen per month tailed off after 4 months.

Figure 1 Stem and leaf plot of the mean number of patients seen by the type of senior health officer (SHO) placement. FY2, Foundation Year 2; m, months.