

Accident Management

Help your fellow riders by thinking ahead, being prepared

By: Cash Anthony

After an accident, the people you ride with want to be useful. They will feel helpless enough if they aren't medical professionals with adequate gear to start making a difference, for in serious accidents, first aid seems superficially valuable or is even impossible to render. If they have access to communications and to important information, however, they can still help save your life. In light of Karen Miller's accident last November, here are some tips I gleaned from dealing with an emergency situation. The first four are offered to enable your fellow riders to help you immediately, the rest over the longer term.

- Carry a cellular phone when you ride, if possible. If you don't have one, ask who in the group has one and where on the bike it is kept.
- Carry legible ID and keep it current. If you've moved since your driver's license was issued, you can get a ticket for failing to update it -- as well as cause confusion about such basics as "where does she live?" Check or sign the organ donor box on it, if you would want to donate in a worst-case scenario.
- Carry a list of medications you take routinely and keep it current. List allergies or medical conditions that EMS techs/doctors need to know about to treat you.
- Carry a list of persons to contact and their current telephone numbers, including area codes. If those living with you are likely to be hard to reach, or you live alone, friends who ride with you should be able to figure out easily who to call from information on your bike or your person. (Even if they can gain access to your home by taking your keys from the scene, it doesn't mean they can find your address book.) Karen had thought to carry names and telephone numbers of relatives and friends with her, which saved her fellow riders a lot of stress after LifeFlight left, when they started the notification process.

Hospital and emergency personnel will presume that an unconscious person has given them consent to save his or her life. But even when a rider has a close family member who can legally take over subsequent medical decisions (as far as the hospital's lawyers are concerned), your fellow LSL members may still be uncertain about which family member should be given your valuables, your keys, your jewelry, and access to your home -- especially if the family members argue about it when they get together to meet the witnesses and pick these items up.

It is unfortunately only a cheerful fiction that all of a downed rider's brothers and sisters and in-laws will be getting along splendidly the week that an accident happens -- not to mention the new lover and the ex-spouse. Would you want your cousin who's on parole rummaging through your mail while you're laid up? If you have no skeletons in your closet of relatives, you can ignore these suggestions. But for many of us, there are some troublesome realities among our relatives. So, for the longer term...

- Have a durable Power of Attorney prepared appointing someone close to you to be in charge of your business and legal affairs, in writing. "Durable" means the person designated can act for you even if you could not act for yourself (i.e., if you were unconscious, or sedated for a long time). This is not a "form" document that you can buy, but it is usually inexpensive to have it prepared. "Close" means living in your area as well as close by relationship: if someone is making decisions critical to your well-being, he or she will be better informed after talking to your doctors face to face, if possible.
- If you have given someone verbal authority to act for you in an emergency, do not leave written authority appointing someone else. Revoke conflicting Powers of Attorney and have a correct one prepared. Then tell someone who rides with you whom you designated! If you don't want to discuss this every time you go out, put a copy of the durable Power of Attorney with the list of phone numbers on your bike, or leave it with someone who is on that list of persons to notify in case of an accident.

If you're riding with someone who goes down and are helping at an accident scene, get the name of the investigating officer in charge and find out where the vehicles are going and where the accident report will be. Take photos if you can. Retrieve the rider's ID, insurance card and personal items from the bike and protect them. Find the lists of phone numbers and medications as soon as possible.

Riders who witness a serious accident will be somewhat in shock even if they were uninjured. If you are managing an accident scene where a friend has been hurt, let bystanders help you as well as your friend, if they can. Don't rush to get to the hospital once your injured friend has been removed. Take time to collect yourself before riding again. Have a drink of water (shock can make you dry-mouthed), and try to remember to thank the emergency personnel and any bystanders who helped you, before you leave.