



Faculty of Sport
and Exercise
Medicine UK

FSEM

MINIMUM STANDARDS

Guidance for Healthcare
Professionals Providing Athlete
Immediate Care in non-grassroots
sport in the United Kingdom (UK)

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Guidance for Healthcare Professionals Providing Athlete Immediate Care in non-grassroots sport in the United Kingdom (UK)

1. Minimum Qualifications for Athlete Immediate Care

Safe and effective athlete immediate care requires clinicians to hold appropriate, role-specific knowledge and skills to ensure they can act swiftly and competently in emergency and time critical scenarios that may arise during training or competition. A variety of sport-specific pre-hospital emergency care courses exist, where healthcare professionals involved in sport receive training and assessment on their ability to deliver safe and effective athlete immediate care.

All clinicians providing athlete immediate care must hold evidence-based, nationally recognised and accredited training in sport-specific pre-hospital emergency care. The level of qualification required should reflect the demands of the sport, the level of competition, and the environment in which care is delivered.

The Faculty of Pre-Hospital Care (FPHC) of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh endorses various sport-specific pre-hospital care courses¹. These courses cover a range of topics, from basic first aid to advanced trauma management, and are designed to equip healthcare professionals with the skills needed to handle emergencies in sports settings. Endorsement from the FPHC ensures that the courses meet their minimum standards for curriculum content and educational delivery. Healthcare professionals providing immediate care medical services to sporting organisations within the UK are recommended to ensure that their immediate care course is endorsed by the FPHC.

Healthcare professionals are recommended to ensure their qualifications are:

- **Sport-specific where possible**
- **Endorsed by the Faculty of Pre-Hospital Care**
- **Valid and in-date** (in accordance with the particular course requirements), **with evidence of certification and expiry dates**
- **Appropriate to their scope of practice and level of responsibility**
- **Comply with any relevant regulations or requirements for their particular sport**

Employers and sporting organisations must verify and maintain a register of all clinical personnel providing athlete immediate care, including evidence of their up-to-date qualifications, with dates of expiration and recertification.

Where clinicians are working in a self-employed, freelance and/or ad hoc capacity (e.g., event medical providers), it is the responsibility of the clinician to risk assess their role to ensure they have the required qualifications for that particular sport or sports, that they are working within their scope of practice and that their immediate care role is reflected in their professional appraisal.

2. Scope of Practice and Professional Boundaries

Clinicians providing athlete immediate care must work within the boundaries of their professional registration, training, and competencies. The dynamic nature of sport and the potential for high-pressure decision-making demands clear role definition, appropriate pre-event planning (including medical emergency action planning), effective team communication, and safe escalation procedures.

Understanding Scope of Practice

Each healthcare professional is responsible for understanding and operating within their regulatory scope of practice, as defined by their governing body (e.g. GMC, HCPC, NMC). This includes:

- Recognising personal limitations in skills or experience, especially in immediate care scenarios
- Not undertaking procedures or making clinical decisions beyond one's formal training or professional remit
- Escalating to appropriately qualified colleagues when the situation exceeds one's scope of practice

The General Medical Council (GMC) outlines these responsibilities in its Good Medical Practice guidance², which states:

“You must recognise and work within the limits of your competence and refer a patient to another practitioner when this is in their best interests.” (Domain 1, section 2)

In an athlete immediate care context, this might include:

- A doctor without advanced airway management training should not attempt advanced airway interventions and should instead initiate a call for an enhanced care provider or paramedic ambulance.
- A doctor covering an elite rugby match must ensure their skills align with the trauma risk of the event and should not assume the duties of a pitch-side lead clinician without the relevant training.
- A resident doctor or newly qualified physiotherapist should not perform solo return-to-play assessments for suspected concussion unless trained and specifically tasked under supervision.

Delegation and Team Dynamics

Delegation of clinical tasks must follow professional standards of accountability.

According to GMC guidance²:

“When you delegate care, you must be satisfied that the person providing care has the appropriate qualifications, skills and experience to provide safe care for the patient.”
(Domain 3, section 66)

In sporting environments:

- Clinicians must only delegate to individuals who are trained, competent, and legally permitted to perform the task.
- The accountability remains with the delegating clinician, and they must ensure supervision is appropriate to the context.
- All members of the immediate care team should engage in pre-event briefings, to ensure that roles and communication pathways are clearly defined and that all personnel understand the medical emergency action plan (MEAP).

Safeguarding, Ethics, and Athlete Autonomy

Healthcare professionals must always act in the best interests of the patient, in accordance with GMC’s core principles of trust, respect, and patient safety:

“You must take prompt action if you think that patient safety, dignity or comfort is or may be seriously compromised.” (Good Medical Practice², Domain 3, section 75)

In a sporting context, the following principles should be adhered to:

- Ensure that athletes are fully involved in all decision making that affects them. Document that athlete informed consent has been obtained (and whether this has been verbal or written) particularly for decisions relating to return to play or medications being administered to them
- Prioritise health over performance pressures, even when players, coaches, or management exert influence
- Remain vigilant for safeguarding concerns, coercion, or unethical medical practices

References

1. Faculty of Pre-Hospital Care. Commercial and Voluntary Courses. <https://fphc.rcsed.ac.uk/course-endorsements/commercial-and-voluntary-courses>
2. General Medical Council. Good Medical Practice 2024. <https://www.gmc-uk.org/professional-standards/the-professional-standards/good-medical-practice>

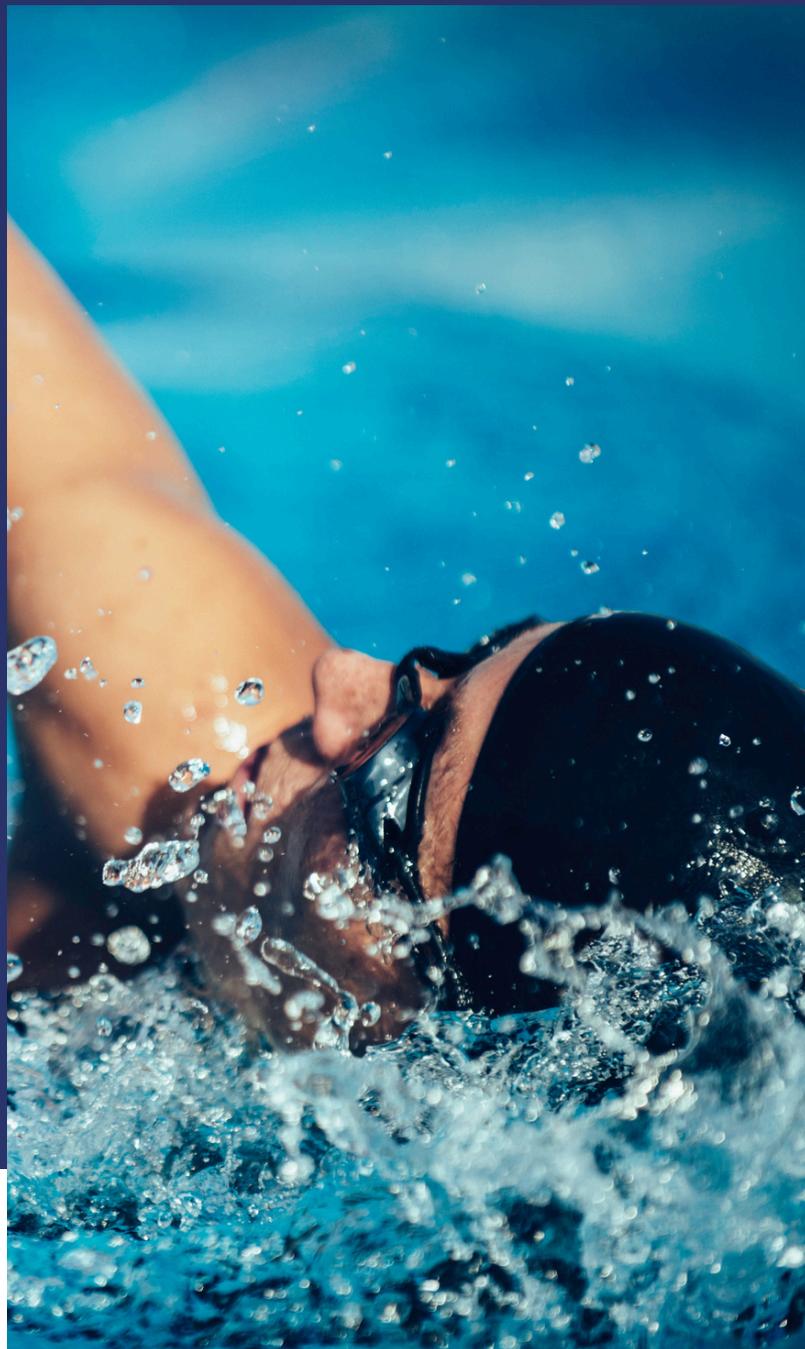
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