

**YOUR OFFSHORE DOCTOR – A Manual of Medical Self-Sufficiency at Sea – Michael H Beilan, 2nd edition. Published in soft covers on the CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform and available from Amazon at \$14.95 / £11.37. 204 229mm x 152mm pages. ISBN 978-1-9795-8087-8**

The skipper is responsible for the vessel and the crew. Just as the boat must be well found and seaworthy, so the crew must be kept safe, victualled and healthy. Preparation is the secret to a safe and sound vessel and to a fit and healthy crew. In *Your Offshore Doctor*, Michael Beilan starts with a chapter on ‘Preparation’. He recommends various websites regarding vaccinations and he emphasises that skippers should be aware of any chronic illness affecting crew members. Crew must take adequate medication with them for such afflictions as diabetes, asthma, epilepsy and hypertension. Remember, there is always the option to stay ashore.

Beilan recommends that sailors should take courses in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first aid. Although there are online courses, there is no substitute for proper hands-on experience with a mannikin. He is keen on record keeping. A note of when an event occurred and the treatment can prove invaluable. In medical practice, it has been said ‘If it wasn’t written down, it never happened’.

The next chapter deals appropriately with lifesaving under the headings CPR, choking, bleeding and shock, and anaphylactic shock. Good advice is given on CPR and the Heimlich manoeuvre, but I could not find an account of how to place a patient in the recovery position, not even in the chapter entitled ‘Unconsciousness’. I agree with Beilan’s advice regarding haemorrhage. He suggests that blood loss is best staunched by direct pressure on the bleeding point for at least ten minutes, perhaps longer. He advises ‘Do not peek’, because more blood will be lost while having a look too early. He dismisses the use of tourniquets, and certainly they can be counter-productive.

Further chapters cover infections (including sexually transmitted diseases), heart attack, unconsciousness, burns, swimming emergencies (drowning, the bends, jellyfish stings), trauma and, importantly, dentistry. In other sections, less common afflictions such as rattlesnake bite and poisoning are described. The emphasis, however, is somewhat uneven. Sometimes more medical detail is included than perhaps is required by a non-medical sailor – for instance three pages explaining why antibiotics are not effective in viral illnesses such as cold or flu. On the other hand an increasing number of yachtsmen are taking a cardiac defibrillator offshore, a practice of debatable value, and yet I could find no reference or discussion of it, even in the section on heart attack.

This is a book to read before setting sail – it is not a handbook to dip into briefly. *Your Offshore Doctor* is written by an American doctor for American sailors. Virtually all the web sites given, mostly good and comprehensive, are American, and temperatures are given in Fahrenheit, as is the custom in the USA. The drugs all carry American names such as Acetaminophen (paracetamol), Demerol (merperidine in the USA but pethidine elsewhere). Bonine is the antihistamine Meclizine, often known as Dramamine. This is not a problem, but skippers must be careful that they carry the correct drugs in the correct doses especially if not bought at home.

The section on procedures is helpful. Different types of injection are described well. Setting up an intravenous infusion (a drip) is covered in detail but at sea is extremely difficult. The casualty is likely to be shocked, ‘shut down’ and cold. This makes access to a vein more than challenging, especially when being buffeted around on the cabin sole in the dark. In my view this should only be attempted by an experienced doctor or paramedic trained in the procedure.

Those who sail with men of a ‘certain age’ should carry a urinary catheter. Acute retention of urine is agony, so learn how to pass a catheter – this book will help. For those with hypertension concerns, which does not include anyone with whom I have sailed, the suggestion

to take an automatic blood pressure monitor is useful. Non-medics should leave the stethoscope at home.

Anyone, any skipper, but particularly a doctor, dreads having to treat someone at sea without proper equipment or drugs. Hence the temptation to turn the boat into a floating pharmacy with enough emergency medical kit to perform a transplant. This book recommends nearly sixty medications for an offshore voyage, some of them potentially hazardous (opioids, adrenaline) which in my opinion is too many unless there is a medic, like Dr Beilan, aboard.

Every boat should carry a medical text – for American sailors, this may be the one.

MHT