Learn to Look

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An initiative to change the lifeguard’s paradigm about the most important task.
Presentation outline

- Review current state of scanning education and research
- Ideas and experiential activities to teach lifeguards to “look”
- Ideas for paradigm shift

“Agreement” Terms of Lifeguard Scanning

- Lifeguards are each assigned a “zone” of responsibility
- Lifeguards are expected to “scan”
More than one way to scan

- Left to right
- Up and down
- Corners
- Zig-zags
- Shapes

“Agreement” Terms Distress vs. Drowning

Distress – the swimmer’s mouth and nose (airway) remain above water

Swimmer begins to experience Drowning when the airway has moved below the water surface
Time is Critical

- **Quick recognition and response** to a distressed swimmer will reduce the number of drowning events, and with improved detection, *reduce fatalities*. **

Why do lifeguards miss victims?**

- RID factor (Recognition, Intrusion, Distraction)
- Water hides
- Environmental concerns
- “Play” victim in training is not reality
- Complacency
- Looking for something that is never seen, very rare
- *Drowning can be subtle and sudden – not always obvious*
Disconnect - training vs. practice

Published by Human Kinetics
Quarterly published Peer-reviewed research
Research 1

“Do Lifeguards Monitor the Events They Should?”

Lyndsey K. Lanagan-Leitzel
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(Dept of Psychology at University of Iowa)

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“Do Lifeguards Monitor the Events They Should?”

- Study was done to compare performance of trained lifeguards vs. untrained non-guards in ability to detect signs of distress
- 30 participants; average age of 21
- Group 1. 10 trained lifeguards (1 male/9 female)
  - Experience included pool and waterfront settings
  - 3 worked <1yr, 4 worked for 3-4 yrs. 3 had worked 6-7 yrs
“Do Lifeguards Monitor the Events They Should?”

- Group 2 – 20 non-lifeguards. (7 M/ 13 F)

- 10 were the “trained” group – received a brief training segment on behaviors associated with drowning

- 10 were the “naïve” group- provided no training

“Trained” non-guard group were taught...

- An unconscious victim is motionless, and may be either on the surface of the water or at the bottom. Many lifeguards report that unconscious victims on the bottom of a pool tend to look like a towel or smudge on the bottom instead of a person, because the water above distorts them.
“Do Lifeguards Monitor the Events They Should?”

“Trained” non-guard group were taught...

- When the victim is conscious, their body is on the surface or just beneath the surface and is usually vertical or on an angle. Their head is usually tilted back so that they can gasp for air as their face bobs above the surface. They are also panicking, so their arms might flail wildly at the surface of the water, and their face might have a panicked expression.

(ARC pg 56-59)

“Do Lifeguards Monitor the Events They Should?”

“Trained” non-guard group were also shown still photo examples (4) of:

- active distressed and drowning swimmers on surface
- drowning motionless on the surface
- drowning motionless on the bottom

and were told to look for distress/drowning behaviors (submersion, splashing, low profile in the water)

“Naïve” group was told to “look at whatever interests you”
“Do Lifeguards Monitor the Events They Should?”

- Study included 60 30 second long video clips
- 3 settings- indoor lap pool w/diving well used by adults
  
  state park lake w/children and teens
  
  outdoor pool w/some adults and many children

Participants would watch the videos, while their eye movement was tracked and fixation documented

Instructed that if they notice safety concerns to fixate their eyes on the danger area

“Do Lifeguards Monitor the Events They Should?”

- Results: 2 variables of interest- the average number of fixations per clip and the average length of each fixation
- The overall effect of group on the number of fixations per clip were significant
- Lifeguards had more fixations than naïve 31.32 vs. 26.64 but lifeguards didn’t differ from “trained” 31.32 vs. 29.80
- “Trained” did not differ from naïve 29.80 vs. 26.64
What does this mean?

As much as lifeguard instructors believe that they are doing well in training lifeguards how to scan and recognize distress/drowning, the results of performance are NOT significantly better than non-guards who received a very basic level of training.

People not trained (at all) were still very close to the performance of the trained group, which was close to the lifeguard certified group.

Research 2

“Brief report: A brief intervention to improve lifeguard surveillance at a public swimming pool”


Observed LG scanning and rule enforcement at pool

Concluded that guards were often distracted (not looking at zone) and only warned swimmers of rules and dangers a fraction of the time.
"A Brief Intervention to Improve Lifeguard Surveillance at a Public Swimming Pool"

- BUT... after a brief intervention program designed to call attention to their distraction and the real risk of drowning, the lifeguard scan performance improved

Research 3

"Lifeguards Watch But They Don’t Always See"


- Studied 500 lifeguards in 90 different pools

- Water rescue manikin was placed in a lifeguard’s zone (without knowledge) and response (noticed) was timed up to 3 minutes maximum
“Lifeguards Watch But They Don’t Always See”

Results:
- Average time it took to notice was 1 minute 14 seconds
- Only 9% noticed in 10 seconds or less
- 14% never noticed in the 3 minute time frame
- Review of video showed that the lifeguards were scanning as they were trained- they simply failed to notice the manikin.

Research 4

“How Lifeguards Overlook Victims: Vision and Signal Detection”
- Hunsucker J.; Davison, S.
- Invited contribution published in the International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education (Vol 2, No 1, Feb 2008) with a reaction paper contributed by Tom Griffiths.
“How Lifeguards Overlook Victims: Vision and Signal Detection”

- Vigilance decreases exponentially after 30 minutes of concentration on the same task
- Signal frequency has to occur often enough so the guard will be primed to recognize it.

*If guards fall into the mindset of thinking they will not see anything...when a real drowning comes along their chance of successfully seeing it will have been degraded*

Research 5

Statistics show that the rescue rate at lifeguarded beaches and pools dramatically surpasses the drowning rate (USLA, 2009), suggesting that lifeguards may be capable of noticing most instances of drowning. BUT...

- It is unknown whether they search for the behaviors that they are taught or whether they develop other strategies independently to complete the task.
Why a new initiative?

- Lifeguards (and Supervisors/Managers) need to be consistently reminded about the importance of pro-active surveillance...

  Because
  It's not a training issue alone

Learn to Look

Scanning is **NOT** Looking

Looking requires more
What are you seeing when you scan?

A System of Learning to Look

Who  What  When  Where  Why
What

- Scanning patterns
- 5-Minute Scanning Strategy - change something about every 5 minutes (sit, stand, stroll; posture, position, pattern)
- “Lookin left, ‘lookin right” – teaches head movement
- Other?

When

- “Protection Rules”
  - 10/10
  - 10/20
  - 30 sec window
  - Other?
Where

- 3-D Triage Scanning – bottom up
- Manikin drops
- Shadow or token drops
- Other?

Who

- Shadow guarding – developing the “big eye”
- Vigilance Voice
- High risk groups/activities
- Other?
Why

- Vigilance Voice –
  “Why is what you are looking at important?”

Because...
It’s not a training issue alone

What will you see if lifeguards don’t understand “why”?
“Image” of Lifeguards
We know it can be difficult

- BUT when a guard is trained, and hired to do a job....
  The expectation of Good performance is high

Why make it even more difficult?
Paradigm shift is our biggest challenge
Learn to Look isn’t just one skill

Consists of a variety of things that need and can be done

- change a “mindset” {i.e. Dr. John Hunsucker’s “become a hunter” mindset}
- Develop intuition and a sense of the overall scene {i.e. Jim Wheeler’s “the big eye”}
- Valid guards are “looking” at what’s important {i.e. Terri Smith’s “Vigilance Voice”}
- model behavior that supports the understanding of the time element, etc

The Learn to Look (L2L) Initiative

• will develop activities & resources based on a variety of proven methods and strategies
• to create a system for teaching lifeguards the who, what, when, where and why of learning to look.
Technological advances & research

- L2L will evaluate new technology such as underwater surveillance, and promote research
New ideas about scanning

Teach to **L 4 L**

“Look 4 Life”

- Instead of being on the look-out for the rare instance of trouble, who’s absence leads to complacency and lose of attention and focus...

- Let’s train to look for what we should expect to witness

*(positive reinforcement)*
What should a guard look for?

Just like in early CPR care- **signs of LIFE**!

On surface,
- head above water,
- breathing..... moving,
  
  **happy/ SAFE!**

“Look 4 Life”

- Rather than searching for dead bodies let’s confirm that everyone in the zone is ALIVE and WELL

- At the end of scan sweep, don’t think I didn’t see any problems...think “**all is well**” and start over again
“Look For Life”

- Rather that complicate training and have to focus on all the possibilities of behavior that shows distress or drowning,

*L4L is simple and easy to remember!*
Join us in our effort to teach guards to Learn to Look™

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