



# **Medical Needs at Ultra-Endurance Footraces: Race Director's Perspective**

**Craig Thornley**



# My Background

Waldo 100K RD 12 years

WS 100 RD 2 years

National Ski Patrol 15 years

Hill Chief, Patrol Director, Region Director

Outdoor Emergency Care Instructor

UltraRunner since 1997

About 80 ultra finishes

14 100 mile finishes (8 WS)



# Topics

Medical Coverage Philosophies

Tensions, Stupid Things Runners Do, Examples

Who is in Charge - At Aid Stations?

Medical Protocols

Medical Kits

Insurance, Liability, Good Sam Laws

Questions



# Medical Coverage Philosophies

Treat runners like horses  
*or*

Let them make their own  
decisions

A natural tension exists  
between these two  
extremes.







# Treat Like Horses

Medical folks given supreme power:

Makes runners do stupid things

Creates a fearful relationship

Increases liability? 'You pulled all these other people but not my spouse who should have been.'

Sometimes the wrong decision is made to pull a runner - RD hears about it.



# Jeremy Humphrey

## 2013 WS

I caught Hal after Cal 2 and move into 7th. However, I was sitting in the Cal Street aid stations a long time trying to subdue the cramps. Karl Meltzer passed me near Fords Bar. I walked most of Fords to the River and was caught by two other top-10 runners (Jesse Haynes and Paul Terranova). I reached the river (mile 78) in a group with these guys. It was 106 degrees. I tripped over my feet as my hip flexor seized and I fainted in front of the doctors at the aid station. I was pretty woozy for a while, but I begged them for time to get myself together. I begged them to call call Craig Thornley and ask him to tell them the story about how he laid in the Highway 49 (mile 93.5) aid for 4 hours while recovering to finish under 24 hours. The problem was that I was cramping so badly when I laid down and the tension came out of my muscles, that they thought I was in medical danger. They made the call to disqualify me and put an IV in my arm, against my protesting for more time. I respect their decision, but I know myself and believe I could have pulled it together and finished- if given the time to do so.



# Runners Responsibility

Make the runner responsible for self.

They may drive themselves too far

Puts the runner, race, and volunteers at risk

Do they have the knowledge?

Liabile if you don't pull someone who ends up  
in hospital or worse.

Brian Morrison 2006 WS

Canadian Runner 2013 WS



# Find Sweet Spot

The sweet spot is likely somewhere in the middle.

Goal: Runners view Medical Volunteers as allies not to be evaded

Good communication RD – Medical Director –  
Medical captains - Runners





# Who's In Charge?

Medical Captain

Aid Station Captain

Ham Radio Operator

Runner, Crew, Pacer





# Medical Protocols

How elaborate should these be?

WS protocols are 30 pages!

Who creates and approves them? Just let the medical director decide?



# Medical Kits

How elaborate should these be?

Expensive and time-consuming to maintain inventory

Out-sourcing these would be ideal



# Insurance

Medical Coverage with RRCA. USATF?

Good Sam laws generally do not cover volunteers with Duty to Act.

Licensed in the state of the event?



# Questions

