Algorithm Chart

An algorithm chart is a visual representation of a series of “if-then” statements that are used to determine treatment procedures or actions. This type of chart can be helpful for beginning athletic trainers or new employees to follow when designing a rehabilitation protocol or dealing with an emergency situation. Emergency action plans are often created as flow charts. Flow charts are usually easy to follow and have a predetermined set of instructions for the task at hand. They serve to provide a predetermined path for the user to follow, which allows a simple means by which to accomplish a task (Figure 3-4). In some cases, standing orders developed by physicians as discussed in the previous chapter are written in algorithm form.

Ordinarily, algorithm charts are used to assist with a specific injury or situation. The most common algorithm charts used in athletic training facilities are for emergency situations, such as for an unconscious athlete. They provide the athletic trainer with a step-by-step procedure of what to do and when, by answering either yes or no to the questions included. A predetermined algorithm chart will give athletic trainers something to follow that comprises carefully thought out methods for providing treatment and making critical decisions.

Pearl of Wisdom

Always sign and date entries. Being able to retrieve health history information and identifying a sequence of events is a valuable process in decision making.

Physician Letters

Physician letters are becoming more common in athletic training. With new laws and guidelines regarding confidentiality, the athletic trainer and his or her institution should establish a standard protocol that physicians are to follow when treating their respective athletes. It may be difficult to obtain physician letters from physicians who are not part of the institution’s sports medicine team; thus having written policy in place in advance benefits all parties involved with care, especially the athlete/patient. If a team physician is treating an athlete in his or her own office, it is a good idea to make sure that the athlete’s chart identifies him or her as an athlete. This identification can serve as a means for the physician to make certain that a letter is sent to the athletic trainer at the institution. An example of a physician’s referral letter is found in Appendix I.

Different physicians may prefer different formats of letter writing to read. In writing a letter to a physician, the letter should outline the personal data of the athlete/patient as well as any other information the physician would like to have included. Providing basic information about the injury itself and the initial date of occurrence helps a physician quickly recollect the scenario. The personal data should include the athlete’s name, age, injured body part, sport, and chief complaint. It is not a good idea to assume that a physician recalls aspects of a patient’s/athlete’s circumstances as well as you, the athletic trainer, might. After all, you might interact with this person daily for several weeks at a time before the physician even has a follow-up visit with the individual.