

MEDICAL SUPPORT ROLES

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The term 'role' is used to designate the tiers of medical support that integrate into a modern military operation. An appreciation of the capabilities and limitations of these roles is essential to improving the care of casualties at each stage. Different nations and forces will have medical support configured with some variability but, overall, systems are similar in order to ensure that the basic treatment, supply and evacuation needs that are essential for a military operation are available.

Role 1 medical support provides for routine primary health care, specialised first aid, triage, resuscitation and stabilisation. It is integrated within a small unit. The capabilities of role 1 care will depend greatly on the size of the unit and the training of the personnel within it.

Role 2 provides an intermediate capability for the reception and triage of casualties, as well as being able to perform resuscitation and treatment of shock to a higher technical level than role 1. It is prepared to provide evacuation from role 1 facilities. It has capability for damage control surgery (DCS) and may include a limited holding facility for the short-term holding of casualties until they can return to duty or be evacuated.

Role 3 medical support is deployed hospital care and the elements required to support it. This includes a mission-tailored variety of clinical specialties, including primary surgery and diagnostic support. In recent conflicts role 3 facilities grew and evolved into sophisticated hard-built hospitals.

Summary box 34.1 Medical support roles

Role 4 provides care that cannot be deployed to the area of operations or is too time-consuming to be conducted there. It is normally provided in the country of origin or an allied nation depending on the location of deployment and time-lines of transfer. It is important to appreciate that these roles are highly variable both within and between different nations. The size and scale of the operations as a whole, along with predictions of both civilian and military medical requirements, will dictate the structure of the medical support.

R1- unit-level medical care including first aid and primary health care
R2 - intermediate unit for resuscitation, damage control and stabilisation
R3 - deployed hospital care with multispecialty capability
R4 - definitive hospital care within the home or allied nation

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