

Dogs help save lives in Bush

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Dogs are helping to save lives in rural Alaska through the Advanced Trauma Life Support training, in which physicians and health aides learn techniques that can be used on injured people before they are transported to a hospital facility for further treatment.

The first few moments after a serious injury are extremely important, according to health officials. And in this program, rural doctors learn skills that can keep someone alive during that critical first hour.

This program is sponsored and administered by Southern Region Emergency Medical Services, Cook Inlet Native Association and the Alaska Native Medical Center, in cooperation with the American College of Surgeons Committee on

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Trauma.

During training, physicians learn four different surgical procedures firsthand with the use of dogs as their patients.

These procedures deal directly with extensive traumatic situations. This is especially important in Bush communities where hospital facilities are many miles away.

Veterinarians anesthetize the dogs and make sure that each dog is free of pain during these life-saving procedures.

Dr. David W. Templin, chief of

medicine at the Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage is the emergency medical service coordinator for the Alaska Area Native Health Service and the head of Advanced Trauma Life Support program in Alaska.

"Advanced Trauma Life Support training is an important program for rural Alaska's village doctors and practitioners," Templin said.

"This program is aimed at Bush doctors," said Templin, adding it is mandatory for Indian Health Service doctors.

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"Many physicians from rural villages specifically had times when they have used the skills learned from ATLS," Templin said. He pointed out that some physicians have said that "these are the most valuable skills they've learned in years."

This program has been operating in Alaska for more than six years, and nearly 200 physicians in Alaska have

been trained for Advanced Trauma Life Support.

The program is scheduled twice a year in the fall and early winter in Anchorage, giving mushers and breeders the opportunity to donate unwanted dogs for this life-saving training program.

"This has worked out very well, and we hope that it will continue," Templin said.