

## Ambulance crews need more training, says authority

By Ella Lee

AMBULANCE officers should be trained to a paramedical level so they would be qualified to decide where to send their patients, the Hospital Authority said yesterday.

The report of the coroner's inquest into the Pat Sin Range fire, published yesterday, calls for a review of patients transfer arrangement and a direct line of communication between health authorities and the Fire Services Department.

The report says the authorities should review the Fire Services' standing orders requiring all patients to be taken to the nearest hospital — a rule which was "slavishly" followed by ambulance officers during the incident.

Seriously burnt victims were sent to Tai Po Clinic before they were transferred to the better-equipped Prince of Wales Hospital for intensive care.

Coroner John Saunders said yesterday he was surprised to hear evidence from one ambulance officer who explained that he could not envisage any situation in which he would act on his own discretion.

Dr Ko Wing-man, the authority's deputy director, said last night training for ambulance officers should be strengthened so that they could make that life-or-death decisions.

"The problem is most of the ambulancemen in Hong Kong are not up to the level to judge a patient's condition," Dr Ko said.

"We have been helping the Fire Services Department to train the ambulance officers. We want the local standard to be comparable to some overseas countries where ambulance officers are on the paramedical level."

Dr Ko said in practice it would be impossible for doctors to carry out triage, or determining the different treatment needs of a number of victims.

"It would always be ambulancemen arriving at the scene first," he said.

"It is impractical to ask them to wait for a doctor to make the triage decision."

He said hospitals always had a medical team ready in case of emergencies.

Doctors at the site would diagnose the condition of the patients and determine where they should be sent for treatment.

Dr Ko stressed that he current standing order was unlikely to be scrapped.

"In principle this arrangement is appropriate because some patients' situation is so critical that life or death could be determined in a matter of a few minutes.

"If a patient dies in the ambulance when he is being transferred, who is going to be blamed?"