



AAC Publications

Cardiac Condition - Failure to Inform Guide Service

Alaska, Denali National Park, Mt. McKinley, West Buttress

On May 27, Alpine Ascents International (ALP) lead guide Sarah Carpenter of expedition Alp-3-Carpenter arranged to have a 68-year-old client looked after at the 14,200-foot camp by Alaska Mountaineering School lead guide Dan Corn, while the ALP team made a carry to the top of the fixed lines. (It is not an uncommon practice for guided expeditions to assist other guided expeditions on their rest days.) At the time of the arrangement the client was not complaining of any symptoms other than minor fatigue. Later that day, while on a short, guided walk, the client started to complain of extreme fatigue, chest pain, and tingling hands. Corn immediately turned around, took the client back to the 14,200-foot camp, and contacted NPS personnel. They assisted by using a Cascade toboggan to haul the patient the short distance to the NPS ranger camp, where he was assessed by medical personnel.

A detailed medical examination was completed. It revealed that the client had not been forthcoming with information regarding his cardiac medical history with either the ALP admissions team or Carpenter. Rangers determined that his current physical condition and past medical history posed a risk if he were to descend under his own power, and therefore he needed to be evacuated by helicopter. Due to poor weather conditions, he was not evacuated until May 30, during which time he remained in the NPS medical tent, with NPS personnel providing medical care. Guide Carpenter provided his meals and basic needs.

Analysis

The client was aware that he had a serious heart condition. He knowingly kept this critical information from the company and guides who were responsible for his and the expedition's safety. He died of a heart attack a month later, while hiking in Colorado. (Source: Tucker Chenoweth, Mountaineering Ranger.)

(Editor's note: It's unfortunate we have to report this. When individuals do not report known physical ailments, medications being used, or previous injuries, they put themselves, their fellow climbers, and rescue personnel at risk.)

Images

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