Wilderness: Treating pain in the austere environment

Here’s a quick review of the article from June 3, 2011 at 61 Local. Unfortunately the rain crushed our dreams of beer, corn-on-the-cob and tacos, but we were able to ease our pain with craft beers and snacks, all locally sourced in Brooklyn.

Pain management is basic and isn’t particularly sexy. However, it provides comfort to the patient after an injury, assuages fear and anxiety and anticipation of evacuation.

The medications are the same, but the delivery methods are more basic due to the impracticality of parenteral medications.

The basic tenets of pain management in the wilderness are PRICE:

P- protect the injury

R- rest

I-ice

C- compression

E- elevation

The extra add-on of protection reminds us that often there are extremity injuries, that do not feel better until they are reduced, splinted, or somehow immobilized.

Next- the drugs

1. NSAIDS + acetaminophen = better than NSAIDS or acetaminophen. Word. Orals.
2. Oral narcotics: every person on the team for a long expedition needs their own script.
3. Intranasal? Not the white stuff, we mean fentanyl and sufentanyl.
4. IM- narcotics
5. Ketamine: safe, dissociative and provides analgesia with less airway compromise.

Bottom line: set yourself up for success. Plan for pain. Enjoy the wilderness.