

Appendix 12B

The Medical Battalion Group

The Medical Battalion Group (Med Bn Gp) was created in the 1980s to replace a combination of mobile hospitals, field ambulance units and assorted other medical units assigned in support of the SA Army's field formations.

In the late 1970's before the establishment of the AMHS as an independent service, the SA Army's medical corps' mobile elements were organised as follows: 23 Mobile Hospital, 48 Field Ambulance Unit and 26 Field Hygiene Company were assigned to 1 SA Corps. 7 Infantry Division, as it then was, had 17 Mobile Hospital and 17 Field Ambulance Unit as divisional troops, while each brigade had assigned a field ambulance unit (number 71, 72 and 73). 8 Armoured Division had a similar medical organisation, with 18 Mobile Hospital and 18 Field Ambulance Unit as divisional troops, and the brigade field ambulance units numbered 81, 82, 83 and 84 respectively.

There are currently (2007) five medical battalion groups, three staffed by the Reserve Force and two by the regulars. In theory they have the same structure, but in practice this may not be the case, as the regular battalions may be tailored to their specialist functions – 7 Med Bn Gp to supporting the Special and Airborne Forces and 8 Med Bn Gp the SA Army's conventional forces. This structure will have to change to accommodate the Army's restructuring into a field force of ten brigades organised into a Special Operations (airborne and amphibious) Brigade and two field divisions, one heavy (mechanised) and one medium (motorised). The current structure of a Med Bn Gp is reflected below:

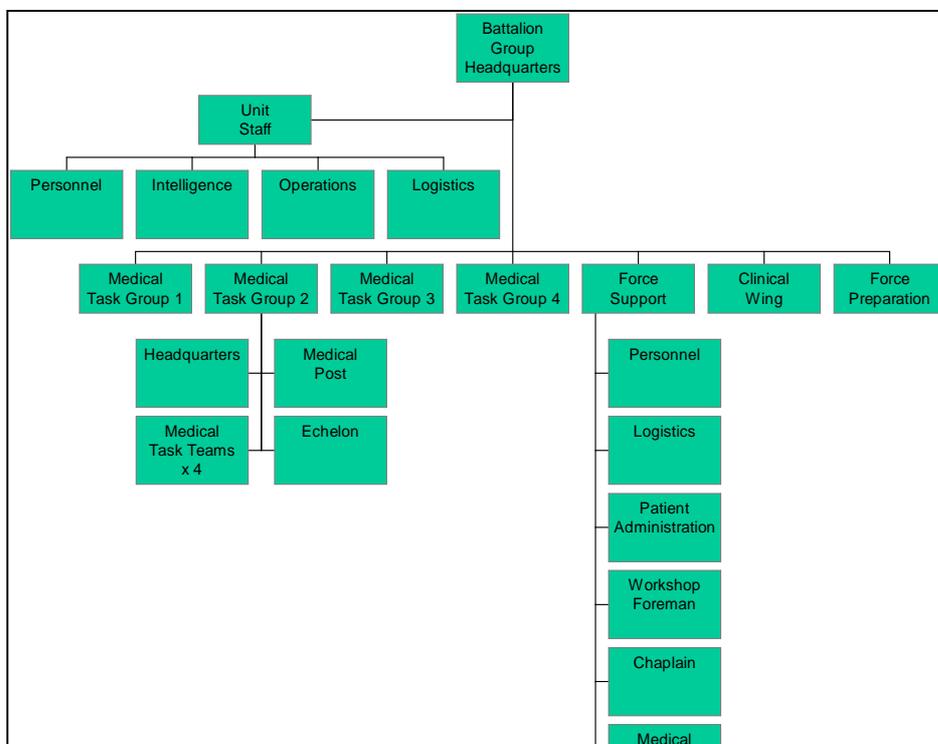


Table 12B.1: The Medical Battalion Group

The Med Bn Gp was designed to support a field division in all its medical needs. The unit is built around four medical task groups and a clinical wing, the former replacing the field ambulance in support of the manoeuvre brigades and the latter the mobile hospital. In support are a force support and a force preparation element. The medical task group, in turn, consists of a headquarters, a medical post and four medical teams, with an echelon to provide logistic support. The clinical wing includes a tactical and a support section, each with various subsections (see Table 12B.2).

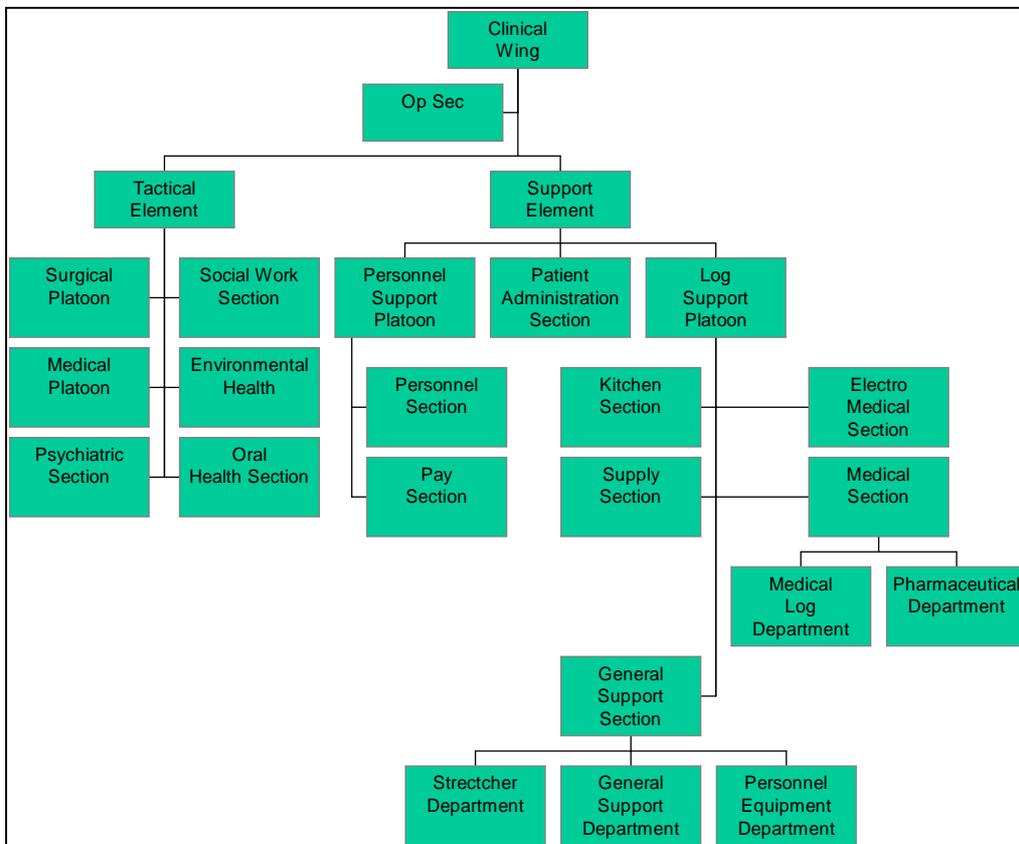


Table 12B.2: The Medical Battalion Group Clinical Wing

International comparison

There are indications that the organisation of the medical battalion group is not on par with international practice. When the country was in international isolation this did not matter and neither did it in the first years after the democratic transition, when the

country did not participate in international peace support operations. Internationally, medical units are organised in terms of function or capability required, while in SA it is based on physical structures. The two organisations are largely incompatible, with UN units organised as “Level 1, 2 or 3” and the SAMHS deploying a Resuscitation (Resus) Post, Surgical Post and Clinical Wing. However, the Resus and Surgical Posts are broadly comparable to a Level 1 unit and the Clinical Wing to a Level 2 unit, meaning the SAMHS strictly lacks a deployable Level 3 capability. There is an argument that reorganising could bring an overall cost saving and international recognition in that the clinical wing would be scaled down and would have less equipment to keep serviceable and would require less personnel. Including the Surgical Post in a Level 1 unit would bring surgeons closer to the wounded and ensure they were helped sooner while the capabilities of the Resus Post would be expanded.

Comparison: Resus Post v Level 1 unit

Resus Post	Level 1 Unit
Personnel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Medical Officer • 3 Ops Medics • 4 Support Staff 	Personnel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Medical Officers • 6 Ops Medics/Nurses • 3 x Support Staff
Equipment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modified Kwê • Resus and life support equipment 	Equipment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical and ward equipment • Resus and life support equipment • Minor surgical procedure sets • Field lab • Autoclave/Fridge • Pharmacy • 2 Ambulances
Holding capacity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 patients for 1 day 	Holding capacity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 patients for 2 day
Treatment capability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily brigade casualties 	Treatment capability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 patients per day
Primary health care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited 	Primary health care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Force of 700
Self sustaining <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 days 	Self sustaining <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60 days

Clinical Wing	Level 2 Unit
<p>Personnel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 Surgeons • 9 Anaesthetists • 18 Medical Officers • 18 Ops Medics • 84 Support Staff <p>Equipment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical and ward equipment • Resus equipment • Standard theatre equipment • Intensive Care Unit • Field Lab • X-Ray facility • Dental equipment • Autoclave/Fridge <p>Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reception/Admin • Resus area • OPD • 4-5 wards • 15 bed intensive care • 3 Theatres • X-Ray unit • Lab unit • Dental unit • Sterilisation unit • Blood bank <p>Treatment capability per day</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 major surgeries • Primary health care for 7000 • 15 Dental patients • ? outpatients • ? X-rays 	<p>Personnel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Surgeons • 1 Anaesthetist • 1 Medical Officer • 10 Ops Medics/Nurses • 8 x Support Staff <p>Equipment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical and ward equipment • Resus equipment • Standard theatre equipment • High Care Unit • Field Lab • X-Ray facility • Dental equipment • Autoclave/Fridge <p>Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reception/Admin • Resus area • OPD • 1-2 wards • 1-2 bed high care • 1 Theatre • X-Ray section • Lab • Dental section • Sterilisation area <p>Treatment capability per day</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-4 major surgeries • Primary health care for 1000 • 5-10 Dental patients • 40 outpatients • 10 X-rays

<p>Holding capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 180 patients for 2 day <p>Self sustaining</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 30 days	<p>Holding capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10-20 patients for 7 days <p>Self sustaining</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 60 days
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