

# Deployment of Foreign Medical Teams: An Initiative to Reduce the Aftermaths of Public Health Emergencies

Saurabh Ram Bihari Lal Shrivastava\*, Prateek Saurabh Shrivastava and Jegadeesh Ramasamy

Department of Community Medicine, Shri Sathya Sai Medical College and Research Institute, Kancheepuram, India

## Abstract

Every year one or another calamity or a disaster or an infectious disease claims lives of numerous people, including health professionals, all across the world. A wide range of parameters have been identified which collectively leads to a poor response of a nation to health emergency. In an attempt to improve the response to a public health emergency, the World Health Organization (WHO) has started a new initiative to build Foreign Medical Teams (FMTs) which can be employed anytime anywhere to manage such situations. These FMTs are well-trained, experienced, and self-sufficient with regard to required equipments or supplies, and hence do not cast a burden on the local health care delivery system. To conclude, deployment of Foreign Medical Teams in response to a public health emergency in affected nations is a welcome initiative of the World Health Organization. These teams not only save the lives of numerous people, but even play a crucial role in the strengthening of the health system on a long-term basis.

**Keywords:** Emergency; Foreign Medical teams; Health system; World Health Organization

## Introduction

Every year one or another calamity or a disaster or an infectious disease claims lives of numerous people, including health professionals, all across the world [1,2]. Although, in most of such events, developed nations are successful in reducing the aftermaths of the major public health emergencies, however, most of the developing nations fail to respond to them effectively [1,3].

## Identified Shortcomings

A wide range of parameters like minimal political commitment; minimal expenditure of a nation's gross domestic product on health; absence of preparedness; lack of an action plan to respond to any emergency; weak public health infrastructure (in terms of accessibility and availability of health services 24x7); resource constraints; vacant health professional posts; untrained status of the health workers; minimal sensitization/awareness both among the team of health workers and the general population; etc., have been identified which collectively leads to a poor response of a nation to health emergency [1,3,4].

## Newer Response by World Health Organization

In an attempt to improve the response to a public health emergency, the World Health Organization (WHO) has started a new initiative to build foreign medical teams (FMTs) which can be employed anytime anywhere to manage such situations [5]. It is absolutely true that local health workers respond to an emergency with a good intention only, however, because these workers often lack in appropriate skills to manage the situation in-hand, they not only endanger their lives but even lives of the local people [5].

## Foreign Medical Teams

Foreign Medical Teams (FMTs) refer to a group of health professionals (doctors, nurses, paramedics etc.), which constitute a significant element of the global health workforce, and plays a precise role in managing patients affected by an emergency or disaster [6]. The members of the team often come from governments, charities, militaries, and international welfare agencies, and execute their roles in

accordance with the guidelines established by WHO and its associates [5].

These FMTs are well-trained, experienced, and self-sufficient with regard to required equipments or supplies, and hence do not cast a burden on the local health care delivery system [7,8]. Thus, FMTs ensure an effective response and even facilitates better coordination between health professionals and the local people [5,6,9]. FMTs have been classified into various types like teams for outpatient emergency care, or inpatient surgical emergency care, or inpatient referral care, or additional specialized care teams (for care of children, pregnant women, patients with disabilities and older people, etc.) [6,10].

## Registration of Foreign Medical Teams

In order to streamline the actions of FMTs and to significantly enhance the overall benefit to the victims of a disaster or a public health emergency, the WHO has started a global registration system, which verifies, classify and then deploy the FMTs in a specific health emergency [5]. This not only allows a specific nation to call upon the pre-registered FMTs without being worried about the quality of the members of the team, but even improves the level of coordination between clinical care teams, and provides a timely response to the affected governments and populations [5,8,9].

From the quality control aspect, this registration system acts as a platform for bringing about an improvement in the overall quality, as these teams work in coordination and share their best practices. On the

**\*Corresponding author:** Dr. Saurabh Ram Bihari Lal Shrivastava, Department of Community Medicine, 3rd floor, Shri Sathya Sai Medical College and Research Institute, Ammapettai village, Thiruporur - Guduvancherry Main Road, Sembakkam Post, Kancheepuram-603108, Tamil Nadu, India, Tel: +919884227224; E-mail: drshrishri2008@gmail.com

**Received** April 16, 2015; **Accepted** May 30, 2015; **Published** June 06, 2015

**Citation:** Shrivastava SR, Shrivastava PS, Ramasamy J (2015) Deployment of Foreign Medical Teams: An Initiative to Reduce the Aftermaths of Public Health Emergencies. Biol Med S3: 006. doi: 10.4172/0974-8369.S3-006

**Copyright:** © 2015 Shrivastava PS, et al. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

national front, the program managers can learn from the work culture of the FMTs, and thus develop their own FMTs which can also work in accordance with the minimum acceptable standards [11].

## Field Deployment of FMTs

Since its constitution, the FMTs were first time successfully deployed to counter the after-effects of typhoon Haiyan in November 2013 [5]. Subsequently, these teams have been used in management of disasters like Haiti earthquakes and other calamities, with a trauma and surgical focus [12]. Very recently, FMTs have been deployed in large numbers to counter the menace of Ebola virus disease in the West-African nations and in cyclone affected Vanuatu region [5].

## Conclusion

To conclude, deployment of Foreign Medical Teams in response to a public health emergency in affected nations is a welcome initiative of the World Health Organization. These teams not only save the lives of numerous people, but even play a crucial role in the strengthening of the health system on a long-term basis.

## References

1. Briand S, Bertherat E, Cox P, Formenty P, Kiény MP, et al. (2014) The international Ebola emergency. *N Engl J Med* 371:1180-1183.
2. Domercant JW, Guillaume FD, Marston BJ, Lowrance DW (2015) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Update on progress in selected public health programs after the 2010 earthquake and cholera epidemic-Haiti, 2014. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 64:137-140.
3. World Health Organization (2015) WHO's six-year strategic plan to minimize the health impact of emergencies and disasters 2014-2019. WHO press, Geneva.
4. World Health Organization (2015) Emergency risk management and humanitarian response 2013-2014. WHO press, Geneva.
5. World Health Organization (2015) Building a global emergency workforce ready to go. WHO, Geneva.
6. World Health Organization (2015) Foreign Medical Teams and World Health Organization. WHO, Geneva.
7. Norton I, von Schreeb J, Aitken P, Herard P, Lajolo C (2013) Classification and minimum standards for foreign medical teams in sudden onset disasters. WHO press, Geneva.
8. Hanfling D, Bouri N (2013) Foreign medical teams: what role can they play in response to a catastrophic disaster in the US? *Disaster Med Public Health Prep* 7:555-562.
9. Lind K, Gerdin M, Wladis A, Westman L, von Schreeb J (2012) Time for order in chaos! A health system framework for foreign medical teams in earthquakes. *Prehosp Disaster Med* 27:90-93.
10. Nickerson JW, Chackungal S, Knowlton L, McQueen K, Burkle FM (2012) Surgical care during humanitarian crises: a systematic review of published surgical caseload data from foreign medical teams. *Prehosp Disaster Med* 27:184-189.
11. Redmond AD, O'Dempsey TJ, Taihe B (2011) Disasters and a register for foreign medical teams. *Lancet* 377:1054-1055.
12. Jiang H, Dai XZ (2009) Analysis of the rescue patterns and procedures of foreign medical teams following the Wenchuan earthquake. *J Evid Based Med* 2:122-127.

This article was originally published in a special issue, **Human Biology and Education** handled by Editor. Saurabh Ram Bihari Lal Shrivastava, Shri Sathya Sai Medical College and Research Institute, India