



## Disaster Medicine in Honolulu

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In 1994 a congressionally supported program initiated operation in Honolulu. The Center of Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (COE) was developed as a direct result of lessons learned during crises in the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Balkan region. The COE was conceived and mandated as a world-class organization to provide facilitation of education, training, and research in civil-military operations for response to international disaster management and humanitarian assistance projects.

The structure of the COE is a unique amalgam of Military and civilian resources. A cooperative partnership of the United States Pacific Command (PACOM), The Pacific Regional Medical Command of Tripler Regional Medical Center, and the University of Hawaii has been established to operate the COE. These organizations provide the academic and operational resources which are the foundation of a true model Center of Excellence. An international faculty of recognized leaders in international humanitarian operations provides the scholarly and operational expertise for the COE. The COE employs a staff which facilitates needs assessments, curriculum development, conferencing, training programs, research, and an education based electronic information network. The COE also provides evaluation and development for disaster management and humanitarian assistance, especially where civil-military coordination is required.

Complex humanitarian emergencies are tragic events. They frequently occur in developing countries, which have limited economic resources, and volatile political environments. The Asia-Pacific region encompasses 59% of the world's population, and 70% of the world's natural disasters. The genesis of such complex humanitarian emergencies most frequently include warfare, natural disasters, political and social isolation of populations, and other geo-economic factors. Earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, tsunami, and cyclones contribute to the incidence of natural disasters in the region. Developing countries are at the greatest risk of such complex emergencies, and are at particular risk of natural disasters becoming catastrophic public health emergencies, and destabilizing tenuous social and political environments. Not uncommonly, disasters become complex humanitarian emergencies, under such circumstances. Assistance for specialized health care, sanitation, nutrition, logistics, shelter, and water is required to minimize death and suffering. The COE, by anticipating and training those who will work together during relief operations, serves to establish and maintain self-reliance, security, and vigilance.

The integration of relief operation requires coordination of many diverse organizational elements, to optimally allocate resources. There are numerous examples of poor coordination resulting in wasted resources and ineffective relief. The 1988 Armenian earthquake was one such event. Governmental and non-governmental organizations have not had mechanisms for coordinating efforts during many disaster response missions. The multitude of responders involved in massive relief missions, including Red Cross, United Nations, non-governmental volunteer organizations, military, and other international relief societies, exemplifies why coordi-

ination is the key to effective and efficient operations. The mission of the COE is to facilitate cooperative, coordinated, and integrated disaster response capabilities through its activities in the Asia-Pacific region. The COE has collaborated with Government, Military, UN, ICRC, Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and CDC.

The COE has sponsored numerous on-site and transportable educational programs. Most recently a local seminar in training for rapid response to terrorist activity was conducted in Honolulu. Seminars for training and regional needs assessment have been conducted in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the former Yugoslavia, and the US mainland. In addition to training military personnel in operations other than war, the COE hosts meetings between agencies. The Switzerland based International Committee for Red Cross, for example, was not comfortable associating with the military combatants. The COE provides a medium to facilitate effective communication in situations where cultural barriers may be barriers to productive working relationships, such as this.

The Staff of the COE is lead by Dr Frederick (Skip) Burkle MD, MPH, who is a professor of Pediatrics and Chair of the Emergency Medicine Division at John A. Burns School of Medicine. Dr Burkle is also a Naval reserve officer, with the rank of Captain. He served in the Gulf War and is the author of the first published textbook of Disaster Medicine. He is an expert in Complex Humanitarian Emergencies and Triage. As a recognized international authority in Disaster Medicine he leads a world class organization.

A major component of The Center of Excellence is the **Pacific Disaster Management Information Network (PDMIN)**, an electronic information and development center. The primary focus of the PDMIN is an Internet presence via World Wide Web architecture which features: select links to other disaster-related Internet sites; disaster-related news and weather reports; historical data; Pacific Rim disaster-related information; information on current disasters; electronic journals and newsletter; discussion and e-mail groups; fully-searchable full-text publications including country-specific disaster management handbooks and plans. The World Wide Web enables user-friendly global access and retrieval of a wide variety of information. The current URL is <http://204.208.4.136>.

### An Open Letter to My Son

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This is such simple advice that we often forget it. But you can imagine how important it is only if you have been the patient rather than the doctor. Start now and all of these traits will be with you for your professional lifetime.

*Love, Dad*

#### Editors note:

This letter appeared in the American Academy of Dermatology report in *Dermatology World* Vol. No. 10, October 1996 page 3. In his provisions letter Dr Sams said "I have received more comments about that particular essay than any of the others I have written thus far. I am, indeed flattered that you would wish to publish it in the *Hawaii Medical Journal* and I would consider it an honor to have it there." This letter of fatherly advice should be presented to every medical student.