WHO Emergency Response to the Syria Crisis

Richard J. Brennan,
Department of Emergency Risk Management & Humanitarian Response
Background

- Assad family since 1970
  - Bashar in 2000

- Arab Spring in Syria
  - Peaceful protests, Jan 2011
  - Government crackdowns, March 2011
  - Escalation of violence – armed struggle
Political Context

- No political progress
  - Government & opposition intransigent
  - Military options being pursued
  - Humanitarian needs worsening

- Opposition groups
  - Numerous stakeholders
  - < 2,000 brigades & militias

- Political implications enormous & complex
  - Increasingly sectarian
  - National, regional, international
Humanitarian Overview

- Population: 22 million
- Number in need: 4 million
- IDPs: 2 million
- Refugees: 755,672
  - Lebanon: 245,671
  - Jordan: 235,468
Health Issues

- Violent injury
  - 60,000 deaths
  - 300,000 injuries

- Access to services & essential medicines
  - 55% public hospitals damaged
  - Loss of medical staff
  - 90% medicines produced domestically pre-war
  - Major implications for NCDs
  - 15% reduction in vaccination coverage
Health Issues

- Communicable diseases
  - PH threats
  - Hepatitis A, diarrheal disease, leishmaniasis

- Maternal & child health
  - 90% skilled delivery rate pre-war
  - No signs of malnutrition

- Mental health
  - Major gaps
WHO Response

- March, 2012: Grade 2
  - Repurposed office
  - Surge team; HEL
  - Interagency assessment
  - Coordination mechanism
  - Health sector strategy: SHARP
  - Urgent medical supplies
  - Identifying local partners
WHO Response: Objectives

- Support effective delivery of *life-saving emergency health care* (medical, surgical/trauma, maternal, child health)

- Facilitate access to *essential primary and secondary health care* (preventive and curative) – chronic diseases, RH, child health, mental health
WHO Operations: Critical Functions

- Leadership / coordination
- Information management
- Technical assistance
- Core functions
- Gap filling
WHO Response: Activities

- **Leadership & Coordination**
  - New country leadership, July 2012
  - Functional Health Working Group
  - Updated SHARP and contingency planning
  - 16 LNGO partners, 9 governorates
  - Liaison with MOH

- **Information management**
  - EWARNs 97 sentinel sites
  - HF assessments
  - HeRAMS
WHO Response: Activities

- Technical assistance
- Surveillance & response: EWARS bulletin
- Emergency medical care and trauma care
- Essential medicines list & quantification
WHO Response: Activities

- Gap filling
  - Essential medicines: 1.3 million
  - Surgical & trauma kits
  - Supplies & equipment: 190,000 blood transfusions, 1,500 dialysis patients
  - Mobile clinics: 28,000 patients
  - Stationary clinics
  - Referrals
Operational Constraints

- Access
  - Insecurity
  - Rebel-held areas

- Government bureaucracy

- Capacity
  - One INGO in health
  - SARC

- Funding: 35% for health sector

- Fuel

- Winter
Escalation of Crisis

- Worsening conditions
  - Increased violence
  - Increased refugees
  - Little change in access

- Alternate sources of aid
  - Cross-border
  - Rebel groups
  - Jihadist groups
Syrian Refugee Numbers, June 2012 – Feb 2013

June 5, 2012
July 5, 2012
Aug 2, 2012
Aug 31, 2012
Sept 28, 2012
Oct 26, 2012
Nov 26, 2012
Dec 24, 2012
Jan 21, 2013
Strengthening Response

- WHO Grade 3 emergency, January 11
  - Organization-wide priority & resources
  - Emergency Support Team, Jordan - EMRO
  - Associated response procedures
  - Clear deliverables

- IASC Level 3 emergency, January 15
  - "System-wide activation"
  - Government opposition
  - Emergency Directors' Mission
Moving Forward: Increasing Access Inside Syria

- Regional hubs
- Visas for international staff
- Advocacy for INGOs
- Expand NNGOs
- Cross-line ops
- Cross-border ops
Moving Forward: Strengthening Operations

- Continued attention to critical functions
- Further assessments
  - MH
  - Nutrition
- Capacity building: NCDs, EWARN, labs, MH
- Strengthened M&E
- Light rehab of health facilities
  - Water systems
Moving Forward: Addressing Refugee Needs

- Huge strains on neighbours
  - Lebanon = 6% increase in population
  - Resources depleted

- Regional Response Plan

- Country contexts vary
  - Goal: increase access, minimize negative impact
  - Lebanon: vaccinations, drugs, EWARN, training
  - Jordan: assessments, EWARN, coord
  - Turkey: government control
  - Iraq: drugs, info management
Attacks on Health Facilities and Staff

- Damage to health facilities
  - 58% ambulances damaged or destroyed

- Targeting of health workers
  - 52 killed, 76 injured, 14 kidnapped

- Militarization of health facilities

- WHO response
  - Press statements
  - Statement at Syrian Humanitarian Forum
Summary

- Syria crisis of enormous scale & complexity
- WHO response inside Syria effective,
- ERF central to guiding response
- Priorities moving forward
  - Expanding access and coverage inside Syria
  - Strengthening response in neighbouring countries