WHO Conference on Health Aspects of Tsunami Disaster in Asia

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Hyde-Price, Gergonne, Morgan, Nicoll
Health Protection and Disease Prevention: a Critical Review of Experience – The International Perspective

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Health Protection Agency

- Specialist independent public organisation
- Established by the UK Government in April 2003
- Remit to co-ordinate and provide health protection services across the United Kingdom
- Deals with all health protection threats.
Health protection - Definition

• Preventing and controlling infectious diseases,
• Reducing the adverse effect of chemical, microbiological and radiological hazards
• Preparing for potential or emerging threats to health,
• Preparing for and responding to emergencies

Regan M. J Epidemiol Community Health 1999; 53: 517-8
Eight Themes of the Talk

• Good objective intelligence & needs assessment are key
• Infections are potentially a major threat
• Good surveillance and early response saves lives
• Evidence based interventions and use of previous experience are vital
• Psychological sequelae are inevitable, including among the responders but can be reduced
• Build on what you have already (rather than creating new structures)
• Learn from experience and practice beforehand when you can
• Anticipate the expected, but be prepared to be surprised
Good objective intelligence & needs assessment are key

- Impression of overwhelming need
- Many UK volunteers
- Rapid WHO needs assessment
- Placement of specialist staff
- Effective work
HPA – Contributions to the International Response

- Planning – SEARO
- Infection surveillance Banda Aceh
- Specialist advice and studies concerning management of dead bodies
- Personal volunteer Sri Lanka
Infections are potentially a major threat
Good surveillance and early response saves

- UK 1980s
- HIV & AIDS
- Early multisectoral response
- Political commitment
- Highly effective


Rate per 100,000

Female
Male

Calendar year

Tsunami Health Conference

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World Health Organization
“Health is too important to be left to Ministries of Health – well Ministries of health alone”
Be Evidence and Experience Based – Example Dead Bodies

Myth - Epidemics and plagues are inevitable after every disaster.

Epidemics do not spontaneously occur after a disaster and dead bodies will not lead to catastrophic outbreaks of exotic diseases. The key to preventing disease is to improve sanitary conditions and education of the public.
Psychological Sequelae
Build on what you have already
Learn from experience and practice beforehand

Example – Hurricanes in the West Indies
Anticipate the expected, but be prepared to be surprised

“It is difficult to make predictions, especially about the future”

Yogi Berra
Baseball Player & Sage
Anticipate the expected, but be prepared to be surprised

Example –

Many organisations responding to the tsunami had not planned for tetanus

They did not have antitoxin as part of their supplies
Conclusions

- Good objective intelligence & needs assessment are key
- Infections are potentially a major threat
- Good surveillance and early response saves lives and political commitment and backing are essential
- Evidence based interventions and use of previous experience are vital
- Psychological sequelae are inevitable, including among the responders but can be reduced
- Build on what you have already (rather than creating new structures)
- Learn from experience and practice beforehand when you can
- Anticipate the expected, but be prepared to be surprised
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