

## WORKSHOP REVIEW

### Monash University Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Health Short Course Intensive

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Article 990303

#### **Introduction**

The short course intensive '*Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Health*' was conducted by the Monash University Department of Community Emergency Health and Paramedic Practice (DCEHPP) over a period of five days in November 2007, at the Alfred Hospital in Melbourne.

The aim of the course is to provide health professionals and other key personnel involved in emergency and disaster health planning with essential knowledge and key skills that are based a rudimentary requirement of all health professionals in the field of emergency preparedness and disaster health.

Content is based on a rich and practical compendium of current expert knowledge derived from the contributions of nationally and internationally recognised authorities and experts in the field. Presentations and lectures were based on a wide variety of topics which were presented by A/Prof Frank Archer (Course Coordinator and Director of DCEHPP) and other eminent keynote and guest speakers.

Course participants represented several health disciplines both within Australia and overseas including ambulance paramedics, emergency nurses, emergency doctors, public health and emergency management professionals.

#### **Course Structure**

The course was structured over five days commencing on day one with broad definitions and understanding basic principles of the subject matter. The second day looked at issues from the national perspective with the keynote address from Tony Pearce, Director General Emergency Management Australia. Other lectures of note on day two were mass gatherings and influenza pandemic planning. There followed an evening lecture by Professor 'Skip' Burkle on global health emergencies.

Day three looked at how the Metropolitan Ambulance Service manages major incidents, through the State Health Emergency Response Plan to Emergency Operations Centre management and maintaining normal business. There was also a lecture on major incident management from the public health perspective and from the clinical perspective.

The fourth day looked at recovery, working with the community, psycho-social and workforce issues. In the afternoon A/Professor David Cooper presented on International Responses – a Government Perspective, which was followed by a discussion exercise on an international disaster.

Day five mainly concentrated on international humanitarian aid, looking at principles, case discussions, international teams, the Sphere Project. The afternoon session looked at hospital emergency planning in Victoria and the course was completed with an interactive EmergoTrain exercise.

### **Course Management**

Students had ample access to learning resources and assistance throughout the course. The course coordinator, administrators and guest lecturers were very approachable and made themselves available for questions. Students were issued a manual with course outline, administration material and various references which could be added to.

Lectures were interactive and there were many opportunities to participate in discussions and exercises. Lecture notes took the form of students own notations with circulated reference material.

### **Assessment**

The participants were able to work through the course as either a self development (non assessable) or as an enrolled student (assessable). Enrolled students were required to undertake tutorials at the end of each day and submit tasks for assessment.

### **Venue**

The Alfred Hospital is a major teaching hospital in Melbourne, where the course was held in the Monash University building within the grounds. Unfortunately the chosen venue was not appropriate for the use of presentations, due to the lack of ability to reduce the room's lighting without plunging the speaker into darkness. The venue was also too small for the comfort of participants and provided limited space for speakers to move during their presentations. However participants did have access to the catering facilities of the Alfred and several nearby cafes.

### **Guest Lecturers**

The quality of speakers in this course was outstanding. Participants had possibly once in a lifetime access to nationally and internationally recognised experts and were able to interact with them. The list included A/Professor "Skip" Burkle, Senior Fellow, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, Dr Christina Drummond Infectious Diseases Specialist, Tony Pearce, Director General Emergency Management Australia, Dr John Carnie, Victoria's Chief Health Officer, Professor Paul Arbon Professor of Nursing, Flinders University amongst many others.

### **Discussion**

Overall, the course was excellent and suited to anyone interested in, or practicing disaster health preparedness. The opportunity to network with professionals from a variety of backgrounds and experience levels is invaluable and I hope the course will be able to maintain the quality of guest lecturers for future courses.

While all of the lectures were interesting and varied in nature, I feel the course was overly reliant on guest speakers and the variability of presentation styles was not conducive to the flow of the course. The Disaster Risk Management Cycle (TorqAid) used is not the

Emergency Management Australia (EMA) model generally accepted by the States and Territories. Emergency Management Australia provides national leadership in the development of emergency management.

I felt that the course had an overemphasis on the subject of overseas humanitarian aid. While I understand this was the specialist subject of keynote speakers who stayed for the duration of the course, I felt it overshadowed other important components of the course such as the state and national arrangements. Overseas humanitarian aid is a 'sexy' subject to health professionals and I found it just as interesting as the rest of the class, but it did have the effect of overshadowing other subjects.

### **Conclusion**

I enjoyed the course immensely. I learned in a friendly, interactive environment, was able to contribute to discussions and hopefully enhance the learning of others. The course is an important first step in increasing the knowledge and skills for potential health disaster emergency managers and I commend A/Professor Frank Archer and his team on its development.