



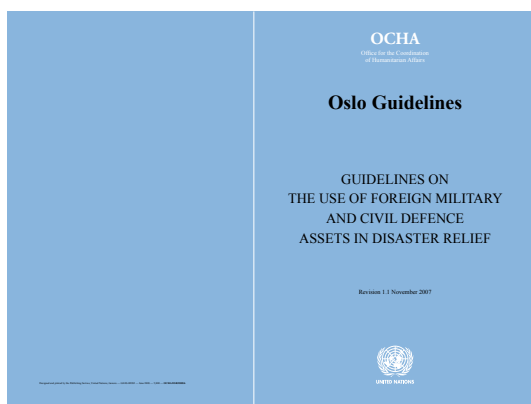
Health Aspects of Disaster Course 2016 : A Valuable Experience in Australia

LT Ajana Sivadechathep, M.D., FRCST*



In the past decade, the world has experienced many complex disasters, either by nature cause or man-made. By definition, a disaster is a sudden event that can disrupt a community or an entire country by causing human, material, economic and environmental losses that exceed the region or country's ability to cope with its own resources. Therefore, international collaboration for humanitarian aid and disaster relief (HA/DR) is essential.

The Asia-Pacific is the most disaster prone region in the world, yet the stability of this region is critical due to its developing economy and global security. Traditionally, the military is the first responder in many cases because of its unique capability to deploy substantial search and rescue, humanitarian aid and recovery assets; however, the Oslo Guidelines (1994) stated that the military should be the last resort for HA/DR.



Even so, international cooperation among militaries in this region would be a significant step toward mitigating the damage caused by large-scale humanitarian catastrophes. The Australian Department of Defence, as a leading military organization in this region, has seen this importance and has supported military personnel in the Asia-Pacific countries to attend the Health Aspects of Disaster Course for the past many years.

*General Surgeon, Division of Surgery, Somdech Phra Pinklao Hospital,
Naval Medical Department, Royal Thai Navy

The Royal Thai Navy has also played an important role in humanitarian aid and disaster relief in many disasters in the past, such as the 2004 tsunami and recently, the great flood in the southern part of Thailand earlier this year. In each HA/DR mission, the Naval Medical Department provides personnel to support the Medical Operations team which is an important part to fulfill the tasks of emergency health care and rehabilitation during disasters.



As a personnel of the Naval Medical Department, I have acknowledged my role in supporting these HA/DR missions which made me decide to apply for the Health Aspects of Disaster (HAD) course in 2016 which was held during December 5th-16th, 2016 at the Defence International Training Centre, Melbourne and the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia. All applicants for this program have to pass the Australian Defence Force English Language Proficiency System (ADFELPS) test to attend the course.

This course consisted of 25 military officers working in the medical department from countries in the Asia-Pacific regions which are Thailand, Myanmar, Indonesia, Philippines, China, South Korea, Pakistan, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, East Timor, Fiji, Cook Islands and Papua New Guinea.





During the first week, It was a must for all participants to attend the Australian Reception and Familiarisation Period course (ARPF) at the Defence International Training Centre in Melbourne which allowed us to get familiar with each other and to adjust the lifestyle and cultures of Australia. The course focused on strengthening our English skills and introducing ourselves and our ideas to each other, while the course instructors introduced us to Australia by providing us better insight through subjects such as Australian history, Australian geography, Australian politics, Australian defence forces and Australian traditions. The course also included a field trip to the Central Business District and historical sites and attractions in Melbourne such as the Shrine of Remembrance which is a museum and a memorial dedicated to Australian veterans serving the country since World War I.

As for the second and final week, participants attended the Health Aspects of Disaster Course which was held at the University of Queensland in Brisbane. The course aimed to enhance the knowledge, concepts and practices of individuals working in disasters and complex emergencies. The course covered from basic to complex knowledge such as types, phases, and effects of disaster on health, public health and medical responses. It also focused on infectious and pandemic diseases, chronic disease management in disaster, psychosocial effects and disaster preparedness. The course also provided essential knowledge for humanitarian aid such as international law and ethics for humanitarian action, cash and financial management, water and sanitation management, leadership and teamwork, and most important, the Incident Command System.

The course included lectures and case study scenarios provided by experts in the field from both the civilian and military organization. Participants had the opportunity to work in small groups and then discussed in class. Because of the short duration of the course and with so many new things to learn, we had to seek out extra references from HA/DR guidelines such as the Oslo guideline, the WHO guideline and the Sendai framework to be able to work in case scenarios and to discuss with other participants in class.



Disaster management is typically divided into 4 phases : mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. Mitigation refers to long-term actions that reduces the risk of natural disasters. Preparedness involves planning for disasters and putting in place the resources needed to cope with them when they happen. Response refers to actions taken after a disaster has occurred. The activities of medical personnel during and immediately after a disaster fall into this category. Recovery encompasses longer-term activities to rebuild and restore the community to its pre-disaster state.

In Thailand, military aid in HA/DR during disasters are activated from the government when in need. The Royal Thai Navy has a Disaster Relief Center in all Naval bases throughout the country and once a disaster occurs, these centers will seek assistance from the Naval Medical Department. Disaster Medical Assistance Teams (DMAT) and Medical Emergency Response Teams (MERT) from 3 main Naval hospitals will provide medical personnel for medical operations and setting up field hospitals.

The concept of providing knowledge for disaster relief for personnel in the Naval Medical Department has been initiated for almost 10 years in the form of the Emergency Medical Operations for Disaster (EMOD) course. The course aims to train personnel to become a part of the Medical Emergency Response Team. As a participant in both the HAD and EMOD course, I have learned a wide range of knowledge and experiences. The knowledge and experiences gained from the HAD course provides a wider perspective in disaster management whereas the EMOD course focuses on the medical response phase of disaster management. When integrated, the knowledge from these 2 courses will give medical personnel a better understanding and a better perspective in the overall management of disaster which is essential in cooperation with other sectors such as Navy personnel not only from the medical field but also other civilian and international organizations.





The HAD course is open for application annually and expenses are supported by the Australian Department of Defence. Medical Officers in the Naval Medical Department who are interested in disaster management should be encouraged to apply because the knowledge and experience received can be an important asset to develop the curriculum of the EMOD course to strengthen the already elite Navy's MERT team and can become an integral part for the Royal Thai Navy in fulfilling one of its missions in humanitarian aid and disaster relief both in the country and internationally in the present and in the future.

