

relief ERU from several Red Cross/Red Crescent National Societies were deployed. The ERUs are an important tool in the Federation's disaster response and part of the Federation's Integrated Disaster Management Program, which deals with emergency response, preparedness, and rehabilitation.

This presentation describes how crucial the teamwork was, but also how important the coordination of the equipment was for the cooperation between the Norwegian and the Finnish Red Cross in Bam. In addition, how essential the cooperation between the different ERUs was for the operation will be emphasized. The data are based on the author's experience as the head nurse in the Norwegian/Finnish referral hospital in Bam, and those collected from 18 Norwegian and Finnish nurses working in the hospital during the first three months of the operation.

Implications for future operations as better coordination before the departure and the standardization of training and set-up will be outlined.

**Keywords:** Bam; cooperation; coordination; earthquake; field hospital; Finland; international operations; Iran; Norway

**Tjøflåt I: Nordic cooperation in international operations: Experiences from the earthquake in Iran. *Prehosp Disast Med* 2004;19(S1):s11.**

### What Is a Disaster?

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Various organizations use different disaster definitions according to the usefulness. For each particular organization, the medical disaster definition emphasizes the number of persons in immediate need of medical treatment. This definition reflects the operational need of the hospital, in other words, when the hospital needs to alarm its disaster organization, when the immediate/acute needs for treatment exceed the immediately available medical resources.

This somewhat narrow definition sometimes leads to a clash between the needs for professionals to communicate between themselves and common sense. Such an event as the sinking of the ferry in Estonia was defined as "not a disaster" by a leader in the medical rescue organization. Formally, that was correct, but it was not well-received by the public. For most people, an event that costs the lives of >800 people will qualify for the term "disaster".

The narrow medical definition of disaster for many years also was seen as partly responsible for the lack of scientific knowledge we had of families, missing persons, bereaved families, and the effects on personnel working with the deceased.

It is essential to distinguish between disaster medical work and acute/emergency medical care. The first involves working in a situation characterized by a shortage of resources, where the medical or rescue disaster worker will be expected to feel insufficient, but, in spite of this, should know that he is handling the situation correctly and is performing well. This means that the disaster worker must cope with the feeling of relative helplessness. Research indicates that different degrees of personal control, such as real control, perceived control, and cognitive control, are achieved through relevant education/training/real-life experiences, and in a decisive way, contribute to maintaining the functional capacity.

**Keywords:** communication; coping; definitions; disaster; effects; helplessness; resources

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### What Is a Disaster? What Is Disaster Economy, and Where Do We Go from Here?

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There are numerous definitions of disasters, as discussed by Al-Madhari and Keller.<sup>1</sup>

However, the core of all modern definitions focus on a mismatch between tasks and resources in such a way that problems that could have been solved if resources were available are not solved unless resources are brought in from outside the affected area. This distinguishes a disaster from a mass-casualty incident. Thus, disaster is a relative term.

In this concept, disaster economy is a term that still must be defined. Who is affected? Who pays the bill? How is it paid? The current paradigm of market economy will probably deprive most disaster projects of their financial support, as they are not cost-effective in any tangible manner. Therefore, disaster economy also must include intangible variables and focus on what promotes health and well-being, both physical and mental. A pure financial approach is inappropriate in this context since it cannot measure these intangible values and also because it confuses finances with actual available resources. In a disaster, in this context, a thorough knowledge of opportunity costs is essential since prioritization is a crucial component of all disaster management.

These basic approaches should be applied to all phases of disasters, their prevention, mitigation, and management, since they constitute essential elements of a well-functioning coordination and control, which is an absolute must in any disaster management.

#### Reference

1. Al-Madhari AF, Keller AZ: Review of disaster definitions. *Prehosp Disast Med* 1997;12(1):17-21.

**Keywords:** costs; definitions; disaster; economy; intangibles; opportunity costs

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### What Is a Disaster?

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The Norwegian Law on Health and Social Preparedness aims to protect the life and health of the population, and to contribute to their quality of life by offering necessary health services to the population during war, at times of crisis and disaster, and in times of peace.

The interpretation of the terms varies according to situation and context. Many healthcare workers believe that during disasters, patients with the best likelihood of survival should be given priority. Others claim that one could give way to emergency justice in disas-