

International Conferences and Meetings

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As we enter the 21st Century, the world remains handicapped by the increasing risk of large-scale disasters. These events may be the consequence of a complex emergency escalating beyond its borders or the potential for a biological, chemical or radiation terrorist event causing nightmarish catastrophic consequences.

In complex emergencies, tremendous progress has been made in the professionalism of the relief community. Many of the successes can be attributed to organized conferences, continuing education and educational publications from international, non-governmental and academic resources. The scientific evolution of disaster education and training has required that all phases of disaster management, from prevention to reconstruction and rehabilitation, be equally represented in the professional education of the humanitarian response community. In addition, reproductive health, health and human rights, healthcare providers as peace builders, disaster mental health, health and security, and many others are mandated topics at conferences. Distance learning technologies, educational CD-ROMs, and long and short-term degree programs are now commonplace educational opportunities. Risk assessments, vulnerability and sustainability analyses, health surveillance and early warning systems are improving. By incorporating real-time data into practical and easily understood operational and field language, educational resources have the opportunity to contribute even more to the professionalism and preparation of relief workers worldwide. To do so, educational resources must be flexible and dynamic in their ability to keep current and to analyze and synthesize an ever-expanding knowledge base of critical information. Current expectations are that international conferences and meetings will provide such opportunities for their attendees. To do so, both the teaching agendas and the faculty have become more multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral. In doing so educational agendas will better reflect the realistic complex environment and the response capacity of modern disaster management.

The potential for weapons of mass destruction event to occur anywhere in the world is now a reality. No population or country is immune from risk. Events in the United States have shown how vulnerable conventional disaster management systems are. Indeed, traditional disaster and emergency medical systems are not appropriate for managing the major public health consequences caused by these events. "Emergency Public Health" has become a new word in the lexicon of disaster management, a concept still being addressed in meetings and conferences worldwide. Management requirements demand unprecedented lateral decision-making skills and communications, decisive resource allocations, health surveillance systems to identify emerging infectious diseases, and detection devices to protect large populations. More than ever, if mitigation of the consequences is to occur countries at risk will need to share the scarce expertise and resources available. Increasingly, these subjects will be the centerpiece of debate at future conferences.

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