Deployment of Foreign Medical Teams: An Initiative to Reduce the Aftermaths of Public Health Emergencies

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Abstract

Every year one or another calamity or a disaster or an infectious disease claims lives of numerous people, including health professionals, all across the world [1,2]. Although, in most of such events, developed nations are successful in reducing the aftereffects of the major public health emergencies, however, most of the developing nations fail to respond to them effectively [1,3].

Identified Shortcomings

A wide range of parameters like minimal political commitment; minimal expenditure of a nation’s gross domestic product on health; absence of preparedness; lack of an action plan to respond to any emergency; weak public health infrastructure (in terms of accessibility and availability of health services 24x7); resource constraints; vacant health professional posts; untrained status of the health workers; minimal sensitization/awareness both among the team of health workers and the general population; etc., have been identified which collectively leads to a poor response of a nation to health emergency [1,3,4].

Newer Response by World Health Organization

In an attempt to improve the response to a public health emergency, the World Health Organization (WHO) has started a new initiative to build Foreign Medical Teams (FMTs) which can be employed anytime anywhere to manage such situations. These FMTs are well-trained, experienced, and self-sufficient with regard to required equipments or supplies, and hence do not cast a burden on the local health care delivery system. To conclude, deployment of Foreign Medical Teams in response to a public health emergency in affected nations is a welcome initiative of the World Health Organization. These teams not only save the lives of numerous people, but even play a crucial role in the strengthening of the health system on a long-term basis.

Keywords: Emergency; Foreign Medical teams; Health system; World Health Organization

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Introduction

Every year one or another calamity or a disaster or an infectious disease claims lives of numerous people, including health professionals, all across the world [1,2]. Although, in most of such events, developed nations are successful in reducing the aftereffects of the major public health emergencies, however, most of the developing nations fail to respond to them effectively [1,3].

Registration of Foreign Medical Teams

In order to streamline the actions of FMTs and to significantly enhance the overall benefit to the victims of a disaster or a public health emergency, the WHO has started a global registration system, which verifies, classify and then deploy the FMTs in a specific health emergency [5]. This not only allows a specific nation to call upon the pre-registered FMTs without being worried about the quality of the members of the team, but even improves the level of coordination between clinical care teams, and provides a timely response to the affected governments and populations [5,8,9].

From the quality control aspect, this registration system acts as a platform for bringing about an improvement in the overall quality, as these teams work n coordination and share their best practices. On the
national front, the program managers can learn from the work culture of the FMTs, and thus develop their own FMTs which can also work in accordance with the minimum acceptable standards [11].

Field Deployment of FMTs

Since its constitution, the FMTs were first time successfully deployed to counter the after-effects of typhoon Haiyan in November 2013 [5]. Subsequently, these teams have been used in management of disasters like Haiti earthquakes and other calamities, with a trauma and surgical focus [12]. Very recently, FMTs have been deployed in large numbers to counter the menace of Ebola virus disease in the West-African nations and in cyclone affected Vanuatu region [5].

Conclusion

To conclude, deployment of Foreign Medical Teams in response to a public health emergency in affected nations is a welcome initiative of the World Health Organization. These teams not only save the lives of numerous people, but even play a crucial role in the strengthening of the health system on a long-term basis.

References