

The Lessons of Disaster

Unleashing the Power of Learning

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Aberfan Wales 50 years ago ,Oct 21st 1966

A catastrophic collapse of a colliery spoil tip on to the village primary school and surrounding houses

116 children and 28 adults killed . One of the worst ever disaster involving children

Village school buried in Slurry



**Those that do not learn
the lessons of disaster
are destined
to repeat them**

Very Few Emergency Service Commanders manage more than two major incidents

- ◆ **An Essential part of training is learning the lessons of previous incidents**

**An old English proverb
says**

**“A Wiseman learns from
his mistakes”**

What do you think ?

Is this old proverb

Right or Wrong ?

WRONG !

**A wise man learns from
other people's mistakes.**

**It is a foolish man who
learns from his own
mistakes**

Themes

- ◆ Safety issues
 - ◆ Responder safety
 - ◆ Patient safety
 - ◆ Hazards and pitfalls
- ◆ Knowing your team
- ◆ Casualty management
- ◆ Documentation issues
- ◆ Interaction with hospitals

In Civil Disorder

- ◆ Medical and Ambulance crews must remain strictly neutral at all times
- ◆ Ambulances Must not convey police officers through hostile crowds
- ◆ Convey rival factions to different hospitals
- ◆ Use three manned ambulances
- ◆ With CS Gas do NOT rub or irrigate affected eyes



With use of helicopters

- ◆ Establish Helipad near but not too close to casualties
- ◆ Do not allow helicopters to make low passes over the scene
- ◆ Ensure good Air traffic control
- ◆ Consider Air Exclusion Zone
- ◆ Use Helicopters first to bring staff and equipment, later to take patients from the scene

Power Hazards

- ◆ Railway tracks Ensure power turned off AND residual current discharged
- ◆ Bar across the tracks
- ◆ Earthing pole for overhead lines in place
- ◆ Staff member stands on track to demonstrate to me its safe.

Storms and Floods

- ◆ On arrival park on highest available ground, facing into the wind not broad side on
- ◆ Always wear full protective clothing and hard hats
- . Be aware of flying debris, falling glass and tiles

Be aware of high sided vehicles overturning and give them room

If you are mobilised to a major incident

- ◆ Stop and think What If
- ◆ Go to the loo!
- ◆ Grab some snacks and drinks
- ◆ Put on appropriate protective clothing PPE
- ◆ Drive safely to the scene
- ◆ Report to Control first
- ◆ Do not get sidetracked into the care of a casualty.
- ◆ Do what you are told to do, Not what you want to do



Possible terrorist incident

- ◆ Look out for “suicide bomber”
- ◆ Casualties with explosive devices attached
- ◆ Check around for possible secondary device and booby traps
- ◆ Careful liaison with police , only police talk to press
- ◆ Body blown apart is suggestive of attached explosive device THINK FORENSIC

Media

- ◆ Watch for long range cameras
- ◆ Do not laugh and joke
- ◆ Do not have a quick cigarette in public
- ◆ Do not collect souvenirs
- ◆ Do look out for one another
- ◆ Always behave appropriately
- ◆ Do not talk to the media.

Casualty management - Injured

- ◆ Triage
- ◆ Assessment and treatment
- ◆ Evacuation

Casualty management - Fatalities

- ◆ Think Forensic
- ◆ Do not move
- ◆ Take your time use screens if necessary
- ◆ Protocols in place for confirmation of death
- ◆ In England early involvement of the Coroner, in Scotland the Procurator Fiscal. Who in the various countries of the EU ?
- ◆ Detailed written documentation.



Knowing your team

- ◆ Who has been dispatched vs who has medical skills on the scene
- ◆ THE NEED TO KNOW WHO HAS BEEN DISPATCHED !!!

Bogus staff especially doctors and paramedics

Have a checking system

Beware

Clapham train Crash

- ◆ A bogus doctor
- ◆ Never traced by police
- ◆ Claimed to be an anaesthetic registrar
- ◆ Had some medical knowledge
- ◆ Who was she ?



**Never go to the party
unless you are invited**

Hospitals - Knowing your resource

- ◆ Hospitals – alerting, risks to stop accepting patients if over-alerted
- ◆ What is the best way to manage – alert – capacity – capacity – capacity/surge – info on referrals asap

Documentation

- ◆ Why is it needed?
- ◆ Who did what
- ◆ Evaluation
- ◆ Improvement
- ◆ learning

Command and Control

- ◆ Interagency communications
- ◆ Frequent tactical meetings
- ◆ Decision Log; When What and Why
- ◆ Personnel log
- ◆ Careful management of volunteers
- ◆ Manage and control triage as a dynamic process, things change, people can get worse



Parking in Brighton



If you are the Commander

- ◆ Look after your team
- ◆ Early provision of drinks and food
- ◆ Place to wash and clean up
- ◆ Early reliefs
- ◆ Encourage staff to feed back
- ◆ Look for stress and fatigue
- ◆ Encourage team building and bonding

Remember

- ◆ Failure to Plan is planning to Fail
- ◆ Always learn from others mistakes
- ◆ Get it right and nobody remembers but get it wrong and nobody forgets.

The Job's not finished until the paper work is done.

- ◆ Detailed Report. What went well, what went badly. What would I do again ?
- ◆ Medical Debrief
- ◆ Interagency Debrief
- ◆ Publish lessons learnt widely

Be Prepared

- ◆ Ye know not the day nor the hour ?

