

# Something Different!

Marvin L. Birnbaum, MD, PhD

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*...our past has taught us this lesson—and the future will not let us forget it.*

Jennifer Leaning  
15th WCDEM

Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 14 May 2007

This very special issue of *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine* (PDM) publishes the reports produced by the 15th World Congress on Disaster and Emergency Medicine (15WCDEM) convened in Amsterdam in May 2007. These reports include keynote addresses, targeted agenda programs, and chair reports, which capture the essence of the Congress. The important information in these reports took proves that the discipline of disaster and emergency health is establishing its own science.

The keynote addresses effectively set the tone for the Congress; the manuscripts from these addresses are included in this Editor's Corner. These presentations addressed perspectives, predictions, reality checks, the need for and implementation of capacity building and unbiased evaluations and research, and respect for the human condition. Some common threads echo throughout these keynote addresses. There is a need for building the capacities of the world's population to be able to cope better with emergencies and disasters. Differences between the preception of the humanitarian community and those reading/receiving the assistance provided by these groups exist. Keynotes also highlight that the missions and purpose differ between the humanitarian and disaster communities, and we really "must learn from what we have learned".

The TAPs are the brain child of Joost Bierens (Chair of the Local Organizing Committee for the 15th WCDEM), who explains the process used in his introduction to the TAP Reports (page s39). The process is similar to that used by some standard-setting organizations to develop consensus when the existing data are not conclusive. Dr. Bierens had to withstand initial skepticism of doubters who questioned whether the process really would be productive. However, each of the five TAP Reports stands on its merits and contributes substantially to the development of standards. This innovative process contributes much to how we generate information in this discipline. This may become a useful process for establishing standards and the benchmarks to reach them, particularly when conclusive, quantitative data are not available.

The chairpersons of the oral presentations summarize the information imparted during the Congress (pages s80–s101). Often, there were 13 sessions running concurrently and the participants had to make difficult choices about which sessions to attend.

These Chair Reports include analyses of the oral presentations of research papers and special topics, discussion sessions, and panel discussions; unfortunately, they do not include the poster sessions. The range of the material was quite profound and the topics chosen to correspond to the World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine (WADEM) Task Forces and Standing Committees. The information exchanged in these discussions includes, but is not limited to, emergency medical services development and operations, disaster and emergency preparedness, building of partnerships, credentialing and accreditation of disaster and emergency workers, education and training, psychosocial aspects of emergencies and disasters, CBRNE, and landmines. Also, the reports highlight the work of the WADEM's newly formed Nursing Section.

This is the first time such a digest of a WADEM World Congress has been summarized into reports and published. It was modeled after the process used during the 5th Asia-Pacific Conference on Disaster Medicine. The reports generated by the chairs of that conference have been published in PDM (Volume 16, Number 1, 2001: Proceedings for the 5th Asia-Pacific Conference on Disaster Medicine: Creating an Agenda for Action). Structure of the current reports is varied, as the chairs were not provided with a standard format. It is anticipated that in all future Congresses (including the 16th WCDEM in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada in May 2009), selected chairs also will provide information from all of the posters within their respective area(s) of expertise.

In sum, this digest reflects the productivity associated with the 15WCDEM. The Keynote Addresses are provocative, the Chair Reports provide the information we seek when we attend such scientific meetings, and the TAPs introduce us to a new methodology to make such gatherings of experts even more productive.

In his Keynote address, Claude de Ville de Goyet charges the members of the WADEM to: (1) "actively participate in formulating, implementing, and supporting technical guidelines for international health responses"; (2) "summon their courage and discourage ineffective forms of assistance in the aftermath of major international disasters"; (3) "raise enough questions, doubts, or concerns for the independent collection of data to feed a broader debate"; and (4) "contribute with a core of high-level experts available to the UN [United Nations] system, research foundations, or bilateral agencies to learn as much as is possible from ongoing response for the benefit of the population to be affected by the next disaster. Only through systematic, independent observations and research will we learn how to improve and

ensure that lessons indeed are learned and that myths do not survive". These challenges apply to each and all of us. Collectively, we have the knowledge, expertise, experience, courage, and drive to meet these challenges. Accept and respond to these challenges NOW.

Heartfelt thanks to all of those who worked so hard to put the 15WCDEM together (the Local Organizing Committee and its chair, Dr. Joost Bierens), those who so efficiently implemented it (Babette Schmidt and the VU PSOG staff), and to all of the chairs and the medical student recorders who have contributed to this digest. Hopefully, efforts such as these will contribute even more

to the knowledge we acquire at future scientific meetings and congresses. This digest is a good model, and the process should become even better as we grow.

*Continue to learn from today's experience to enhance tomorrow's performance and continue to strive for excellence.*

Fiona Wood  
15th WCDEM  
Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 15 May 2007

*Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe.*

H.G. Wells  
As quoted by Fiona Wood  
15th WCDEM  
Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 15 May 2007