

## Psychological Aspects of Terrorism

David Alexander

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**Wednesday 18th May 2005**

## Plenary 1: Lessons from History

### 500 Years of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh

John Orr

Vice President, RCSEd

### 500 Years of Resuscitation

Dr. Ronald Stewart

### 500 Years of Emergency and Disaster Medicine

Jonathan Marrow

Consultant in Emergency Medicine, Arrowse Park Hospital, Wirral

In 1500, London was a crowded, bustling, and bad-smelling home to about 100,000 people. Most lived on the premises where they worked or at least within walking distance. Most knew little of the world beyond their parish, let alone cities such as Moscow, Constantinople, or the Indies. Vasco da Gama took 10 months to travel from Lisbon to Calcutta in 1498. In 1588, a chain of beacon fires passed news of the arrival of the Spanish fleet to Channel from Plymouth to York (about 550 km) in 12 hours, but for more complex communication, the quickest method was a relay of horses, or a fast boat and a fair wind. Even in 1860, the Pony Express communication system in the United States took almost eight days to carry news of the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California (about 3,000 km).

About 7,000,000 people live in Greater London today. One can fly from Heathrow airport to Calcutta in 10 hours, and worldwide communication by voice, image, or written word takes only seconds.

Earthquakes and floods always have been with us, but we know more about them and their effects than our forefathers did 500 years ago. Our skills in communication and control of energy have enabled us to organize aid for victims much more efficiently, but also have brought new kinds of injury and catastrophe.

Drawing from literary, historical, and medical sources, the changing pattern of injury and disaster alongside technological advances and improvements in the care of the individual injured patient will be illustrated.

**Keywords:** communication; disaster; history; London; technology  
*Prehosp Disast Med 2005;20(2):s2*

## Theme 1: Psychosocial Aspects of Disaster

Chairs: Gloria Leon; David Alexander

### Overview of Psychosocial Issues of Particular Importance in Planning for Disasters and Terrorism

G. Leon

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The presentation covers the salient points raised and general discussion that took place at the Melbourne World Conference on Disaster and Emergency Medicine (WCDEM) 2003 Psychosocial Task Force meeting. A primary issue commented on is the importance of adopting a cultural perspective in planning for and managing disasters and terrorism, including attention to norms and practices of different ethnic groups. The adaptation of guidelines for local use that could utilize the strengths of the particular community was highlighted as well. The specific and sometimes differential needs of rescue workers, the elderly, and children were also considered. Members commented that psychosocial planning must be carried out in a way that does not undermine the psychological strengths and capabilities of the individuals affected by disasters, nor override the plans and facilities already present in the community. In essence, a primary goal of early psychosocial intervention should be to "do no harm." Gender differences in reactions were discussed, particularly observations in war/refugee environments that men tended to respond by feeling that they had failed to protect their families from harm, while women's overriding concern was the safety of their children. In addition, it was felt that there has been little attention given to the problem of how to deal with the use of rape and fear as an instrument of war and terror. Another topic explored was the connection of disaster managers with the media, and the optimal way in which relevant information can be provided to the community regarding the particular threat. The integration of research and practice to learn from previous events and plan for more effective future responses was viewed as a critical need. The task force concurred that an overriding goal must be the incorporation of psychosocial activities into disaster planning and response, that is, adopting a holistic orientation that includes dealing with psychosocial aspects, in all of its ramifications.

**Keywords:** disaster; media; psychosocial; response; terrorism  
*Prehosp Disast Med 2005;20(2):s2*

### Cultural Context of Psychological Defense Mechanisms Following Mass Disaster and War Trauma Experiences of the Earthquake in Armenia and War in Karabagh

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This paper reports on our experience in providing crises intervention for two types of traumatic events: (1) natural (the earthquake in Armenia); and (2) human-made (war in Nagorno Karabagh). The aim of this presentation is to show the influence of trauma on the psychological development of children and adolescents, with a special focus on the role and influence of culture on the defense strategies. The ability of children and adolescents to cope with a traumatic situation is determined by their defense mechanisms and coping strengths. This research is based on assessment and subsequent treatment of 270 traumatized individuals, including 116 children and adolescents from the earthquake-affected regions, and 79 children and adolescents