

# A Model for All

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*He that nothing question, nothing learns.*

English Proverb

*Questioning is the door to knowledge.*

Irish Proverb

By now, you all have had the opportunity to review and comment on the Issues Paper: "International Standards and Guidelines on Education and Training for the Multi-disciplinary Health Response to Major Events that Threaten the Health Status of a Community," published as a Supplement to the last issue of *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine* (PDM 19.2).<sup>1</sup> And, hopefully, each of you has responded to the request for input from the Education Committee of the World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine (WADEM). The Committee and its Working Group need your input to help shape the nature and direction for the future of Disaster Health Management.

I commend the leadership of this Committee and its Working Group for the exemplary direction they have taken to meet the charge assigned to them by the Board of the WADEM. The process that has been initiated by the Working Group deserves some comment.

All projects and decisions emanate from the definition of a "problem" that must be solved or a question that begs an answer. A *problem* is defined as a *doubtful or difficult matter requiring a solution*,<sup>2</sup> and a question is a doubt about or objection to a thing's truth, credibility, advisability, etc.<sup>3</sup> Without a defined problem or question, there is no need for a research or evaluation project to be conducted. Identification of the real/actual problem requiring an answer is the stimulus that draws our interest or is assigned to us by others who seek a solution. The problem assigned by the WADEM Board to the Education Committee of WADEM was defined in the following charge to the Committee: "What education and training are appropriate for the development of expertise (or academic degrees) in Disaster Medicine?" The problems are what constitutes excellence in the practice of Disaster Medicine? What elements constitute the essential knowledge and skills? Such elements will become the standards that educational and training programs must achieve with its students? A *standard* is defined as an object or quality, or measure serving as the basis or example or principle to which others conform or should conform or by which the accuracy or quality of others is judged.<sup>4</sup> The importance of the availability and

use of standards has been described earlier in PDM.<sup>5</sup> Without knowledge of the applicable standards, it is not possible to design appropriate educational objectives and goals. Goals and objectives depend on the endpoints of the educational and training processes; without such goals and objectives, it is not possible to design appropriate curricula. Furthermore, guidelines as to how best to attain such standards are helpful in curriculum design. A *guideline* is a principle or criterion guiding or directing action, or a statement of policy by a person or group having the authority.<sup>6,7</sup> And, who should decide which goals, objectives, and guidelines are the most appropriate? Who has the responsibility and authority?

As I learned from Dr. David Kindig during the best academic course in which I have had the privilege of participating, identification of the issues associated with a problem is a crucial step in the development of a new project or in a decision-making process that addresses the problem. An *issue* is a *point in question; an important subject of debate or litigation*.<sup>8</sup> Often, multiple issues may seem apparent. A clear definition of the real issue or set of issues associated with the problem is the most difficult part of any process, decision-making, program, or the design of evaluation and research projects. Yet, it is the step most often ignored, treated casually, or rapidly passed over.

The decision-making process necessitates a broad understanding of why an issue is an issue. What makes the issue genuine? What makes a possible issue not really an issue? What the Committee and its Working Group have proposed is a set of apparent issues regarding the development of standards and guidelines required for evolving educational and training curricula for disaster health management.

Once consensus has been achieved that the genuine issues associated with the problem/question have been identified, a series of potential strategies/solutions can be defined that could solve the problem(s) or answer the question. The issues and strategies are melded as appropriate, and pros and cons associated with each of the strategies defined. The pros define the positive aspects of the strategy and the cons define the negative aspects as well as the potential barriers to the successful implementation of the strategy.

Finally, the "best" strategies (those most likely to answer the question) that address each of the identified issues associated with the strategy are selected and implemented. In research or evaluation, this results in the definition of

the design of the project and the methods that will be used. In problem-solving, the result is believed to be the strategy most likely to succeed in answering the question.

The process used is akin to the process used by all research and evaluation projects and has been outlined in the posted and published versions of the Disaster Research Templates that are part of the *Disaster Health Management: Guidelines for Evaluation and Research in the Utstein Style*, and will be continued in Volumes 2 and 3 of the Guidelines to be published in forthcoming PDM Supplements.<sup>9</sup>

The action of the WADEM to take the lead in this essential project is quite appropriate. Its responsibility for the codification of such standards is included in its mission statement adopted by its General Assembly during the 12<sup>th</sup> World Congress on Disaster and Emergency Medicine in Lyon, France in 2001:

*The World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine is an international, humanitarian association dedicated to the improvement of disaster and emergency medicine. Fostering international collaboration, the organization is inclusive, culturally sensitive, unbiased, ethical and dynamic in its approach. While individual members are active in field operations, the organization remains non-operational, fulfilling its mission through:*

1. Facilitation of academic and research-based education and training;
2. Interpretation and exchange of information through its global network of members and publications;
3. Development and maintenance of evidence-based standards of emergency and disaster health care and provision of leadership concerning their integration into practice;
4. Coordination of data collection and provision of direction in the development of standardized disaster assessment and research and evaluation methodologies;
5. Encouraging publication and presentation of evidence-based research findings in scientific publications and international conferences and congresses.

The World Health Organization and its Pan-American Health Organization, the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), and others have charged the WADEM to develop and verify such standards and guidelines. The WADEM is the primary, academic, non-operational, non-governmental organization currently charged to take this lead, and we all look to it to develop such standards and guidelines.

I applaud the WADEM and its Education Committee for employing the process rather than jumping into a "quick-fix" solution that may not be a good and valid solution. We are not interested in a quick fix, but rather in defining the Disaster Medicine expert. Once the issues are clear, it will be possible to begin to define the standards and guidelines that can be used in fashioning the professional who will be able to function well in any chosen aspect of disaster health management.

The Education Committee has established a process model for all of the Committees and Task Forces of the WADEM to use in their deliberations to find solutions to their respective charges. The tasks are daunting, but only in this manner will valid and long-lasting solutions and answers be found to the problems that will be faced in the future of health disaster management. Too much education and training has been conceived and delivered with the best intentions, but without a clear understanding of the goals. We all look forward to the outcomes from the ongoing work of the Education Committee. The issues are complex and only careful analysis will lead to the correct decisions. We must define who we really are, what we are able to do, and what knowledge and skills are required to perform our job to the levels demanded. These expectations must be appropriate and valid. Without this understanding, we cannot inform the world of what they realistically can expect from us and our role will remain unclear.

*Tear off the curtain of doubt by questions*

Egyptian Proverb

## References

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