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Theme 5. Application of International Standards to Disasters
Chairs: Dr. Frederick Burkle & Dr. Judy Isaac-Renton

Standards of Care in a Crisis Environment: Lessons Learned from Complex Emergencies
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Nation-state internal conflicts, caused primarily by political factors, have resulted in high levels of violence primarily in vulnerable population groups of children, females, and the elderly, and in the loss of sustainable livelihood. A major characteristic of these complex emergencies is that they represent catastrophic public health emergencies.

The international humanitarian community entered the decade of the 1990s with little expertise and no standards of care. Parameters for water, nutrition, sanitation, communicable diseases, shelter, essential drugs, and health and nutrition assessments were developed with both painstaking trial and error and focused field and outcome research. By the end of the decade, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) had developed the Sphere Project to standardize care and codes of conduct, the UN Agencies had developed training manuals and guidelines, and University-NGO partnerships offered education, training, and research opportunities to further professionalize the disaster and humanitarian response.

Similar efforts are required to develop operational standards of care for reproductive health and women’s issues and mental health interventions. Organizational management standards are lacking in the areas of information technologies and sharing, security, coordinated logistics, measures of effectiveness, and civil-military collaboration.

Keywords: complex emergencies; disasters; education; humanitarian; management; research; responses; standards; training