

19th World Congress on Disaster and Emergency Medicine: Advancing the Science of Disaster Health and Emergency Medicine

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On April 21, the 4-day 2015 World Congress on Disaster and Emergency Medicine (WCDEM) will open in Cape Town, South Africa. The Congress will afford those who are interested in disaster health and emergency medicine the opportunity to assemble in a single venue. Congress attendees will be able to witness the advanced state of both disaster and emergency care throughout Africa. Many outside of Africa may not be aware of the dedication and excellent work that has been done by physicians within the continent to provide high-quality disaster health and emergency care for populations that are among the most diverse in the world.

The original WCDEM was held in 1976 in Mainz, Germany, and since 1979, there has been a Congress every two years at locations throughout the world. Along with the Congress parent organization, the World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine (WADEM), many organizations have shared as equal global and regional partners and sponsors. Consistent collaborators in the Congresses have been the World Health Organization (Geneva, Switzerland) and US National Library of Medicine (Bethesda, Maryland USA). With a primary purpose of supporting the scientific advancement of disaster health and emergency medicine, the Congresses afford an occasion for colleagues from around the globe to compare professional ideas and experiences. Importantly, those newly entering the fields of disaster health and emergency medicine are provided a platform to showcase their scientific work with experts from around the world. Recent Congresses have showcased over 500 scientific and technical presentations, which are also published in abstract form. In addition, Congresses have key note presentations presented by globally recognized health leaders. Despite four decades of world economic turmoil, armed conflicts, and overwhelming regional disasters, the Congresses have been consistently held and provided a platform for the scientific advancement of disaster health and emergency medicine. The 19th Congress promises to provide the exceptional opportunities that past Congresses have delivered.

The 19th WCDEM is being hosted by WADEM, the Emergency Medicine Society of South Africa (Cape Town, South Africa), the World Health Organization, the US National Library of Medicine, Evidence Aid (Belfast, Northern Ireland), and the WADEM Student Mentorship Program. More than twenty topic categories will be targeted at the Congress with presentations of original research, and there will be ample time for information exchange regarding present and future research initiatives and findings.

The theme of the 19th Congress is “creating capacity, building resilience” which will allow for a focus on preventing disaster when possible and use of preparedness to limit the effect of disaster when it occurs. This theme represents the advancement of disaster health science over the past decades to a focus on prevention and minimization of disaster impacts as well as traditional disaster

response and recovery. Disaster risk management will be highlighted at the Congress. Specific areas of exploration include health capacity strategies, identification and care of vulnerable populations, and population resilience building. Additionally, challenging areas for application of current science and best practice in humanitarian activities will be explored, including discussion of purposed credentialing of responders during disasters. During a pre-conference workshop on April 18 and 19, Drs. Bradt and Drummond will present an intensive course in expectations of health-related responders during international relief operations. On April 20 at another pre-conference workshop, the World Health Organization Collaborating Centres will present discussions on mass gatherings with a goal to develop a minimum data set and key concepts for mass gatherings. The expected development of standard terms and nomenclature will provide a future basis for comparative research in mass-gathering-related health and medicine.

The Congress theme is disaster oriented, but there will be ample time devoted to the areas of prehospital care and critical care. A pre-conference workshop on advanced ventilation techniques in the emergency department will provide advanced information on mechanical ventilator techniques as well as non-invasive ventilation methods. There is program time devoted to prehospital response and care delivery techniques and science; further, is discussion of Emergency Medical Services research and future research priorities. Hospital systems and safety are also included in the Congress program.

The 19th WCDEM is a platform for present and future research in the fields of disaster health and emergency medicine. A post-Congress workshop, Framework for Conducting Disaster Health Research, will provide those interested in learning or perfecting their disaster research skills a chance to learn from reputable research experts, including Dr. Marvin Birnbaum, who served as the Editor-in-Chief of *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine* for more than 25 years.

The 19th Congress will provide an opportunity to further work done in previous Congresses, including development of a standard nomenclature for scientific reporting of disaster research. Also important will be discussions and presentations addressing the psycho-social aspects of disaster exposure and experience. The Congress also provides one of the few venues for exploration of prehospital and critical care from the international perspective.

For those interested in more information regarding the 19th WCDEM, please refer to the WADEM webpage at <wadem.org> and follow links that are provided. As an important addition, 19th WCDEM attendees will be offered continuing medical education credit for their attendance and participation.

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