



# **INTRODUCTION**

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The first HELP (Health Emergencies in Large Populations) course, lasting three weeks, was held in Geneva in 1986 as a joint initiative of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the University of Geneva, and the World Health Organization. The purpose of the course is to give personnel involved in mass aid operations the public-health tools that will enable them to plan coherent and appropriate relief actions. The course emphasizes the decision-making process more than the actual technical aspects.

Since 1986, three strategic orientations have been established. The first has been to decentralize the course and offer it in areas close to relief operations in Latin America, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Africa. The second has been to adopt a systematic policy of seeking collaboration with schools of public health in countries where the course is offered so that eventually these schools will be able to take over the organization of the HELP course and integrate its content in their standard curricula. This policy has also helped sensitize academic circles to humanitarian problems in general. The third strategy has been to offer the course to people with solid experience in humanitarian operations but no professional training in the health field. This step has made it possible to broaden the discourse on humanitarian aid and to give these “non-professionals” the knowledge they need for a better understanding of health operations, thereby fostering a stronger interdisciplinary approach in the field.

Since the ICRC is the main coordinator of the course, the needs of victims in situations of armed conflict are the primary focus. However, the tools developed in the course are applicable in other emergency situations as well. The subject matter has been divided into the following modules:

- general management principles
- food and nutrition
- water and environmental sanitation
- the control of communicable diseases
- the management of war-wounded victims
- the organization of health care facilities
- the application of epidemiology to emergency situations
- links between emergencies and development

- the role of international humanitarian law in the field of health
- recapitulation and conclusion.

## GENERAL MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

The variety and complexity of emergency situations call for a rational approach to health problems. During the course, general management principles will be applied with respect to:

- identification of health problems
- identification of constraints in situations of armed conflict
- establishment of priorities
- determination of objectives and strategies
- implementation of the measures required to achieve those objectives
- evaluation of results in terms of both cost-effectiveness and the impact on the health status of the target population

## FOOD AND NUTRITION

This sphere often presents major problems in emergency situations. An overall view of the food system is imperative.

An assessment of needs and constraints, a well-designed programme, the implementation of that programme, and a suitable monitoring system are all necessary elements in any strategy to re-establish access to food resources.

The course will emphasize the following:

- assessment of food needs, data collection, anthropometry, identification of vulnerable groups
- organizational methods, and implementation and monitoring of food programmes
- organization of food distributions and management of nutrition rehabilitation centres

## WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION

Environmental management is an absolute priority in emergency situations, which present increased risks attributable to precarious hygiene conditions, particularly in cases of overcrowding.

The course covers:

- methods for assessing environmental problems (water, shelter, energy, etc.)
- techniques for re-establishing access to clean water
- measures for providing victims with satisfactory housing
- the control of communicable-disease vectors.

The course will emphasize the ways that environmental sanitation measures affect health.

## **CONTROL OF COMMUNICABLE DISEASES**

Controlling communicable diseases can be a major problem in emergency situations, particularly when a population is living crowded together in precarious hygiene conditions.

The course covers the following:

- strategies for controlling major communicable diseases (diarrhoeal diseases, cholera, tuberculosis, measles, intestinal parasites, etc.)
- development of programmes including, if possible, environmental sanitation, health education, community participation, and preventive and therapeutic medical care, in the context of the constraints imposed by a disaster situation.

## **MANAGEMENT OF WAR-WOUNDED VICTIMS**

The care of war wounds comprises several stages: first-aid measures, care before admission to a hospital, evacuation, surgical treatment, and rehabilitation.

This module will examine:

- the importance of each stage, pointing out the impact that good-quality first aid can have on reducing mortality among patients with war injuries
- the general principles of war surgery
- the connection with the issue of arms control.

## **ORGANIZATION OF HEALTH CARE FACILITIES**

Disasters often generate a high demand for medical assistance that completely overwhelms existing facilities. The HELP course covers the general organization of health facilities in emergency situations, examining various types of action:

- establishment of new medical facilities (hospitals, dispensaries, mobile units, etc.)
- standardization of treatment regimens and selection of essential drugs corresponding to identified needs.

Emphasis is laid on the role of primary health care in emergency situations.

## **EPIDEMIOLOGY AS APPLIED TO EMERGENCY SITUATIONS**

Epidemiology is particularly important in emergency situations. Initially, it plays an essential role in the identification of health problems and the analysis of possible solutions. During the humanitarian operation, epidemiological monitoring offers the possibility of modifying the original strategy as needed.

These basic epidemiological tools will be studied in the course:

- selection of health indicators
- sampling techniques
- data-collecting methods
- data analysis.

A special session will be arranged for study of the EPIINFO computer program, which allows computerized management of the data collected.

## **LINKS BETWEEN EMERGENCIES AND DEVELOPMENT**

Emergency situations must be analysed from the overall perspective of development. To that end, the course seeks:

- to identify points of human, social, economic, and ecological vulnerability
- to implement measures designed to prevent new disasters, or at least to limit their effects in humanitarian terms.

## **THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW IN THE FIELD OF HEALTH**

In a situation of armed conflict, populations must be protected.

The course will discuss the following points:

- basic principles of international humanitarian law: the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols

- identifying groups at risk: displaced populations, hostage populations, ethnic and religious minorities isolated in a hostile environment
- making national or local authorities responsible for the protection of victims' access to essential services
- protecting populations living in particularly dangerous regions
- establishing the neutrality of certain zones or buildings in order to provide aid to victims under reasonably safe conditions
- the rights and duties of health care personnel.

## RECAPITULATION AND CONCLUSION

This last module addresses general issues of humanitarian relief, such as:

- the impact of aid on the evolution of conflicts
- the role of health care personnel, particularly with respect to armaments and their effects on health
- evaluating the impact of humanitarian aid
- coordination between the various humanitarian agencies, and their relations with political agencies.

This module will help participants to orient humanitarian aid within a global context that includes the political environment.

The material covered in this course was published by the ICRC in *War and Public Health* in 1996. The teaching method is based on problem-solving. To that end, course planners have developed a simulation exercise presenting most of the health problems that may confront a population in a situation of armed conflict. Course participants are given the knowledge they need to analyse problems correctly and to propose context-appropriate solutions. Accordingly, each module is divided into educational objectives falling into three categories. Each objective includes:

- a description
- identification of the category to which the objective belongs, namely:
  - “framework”—objective defining the framework and limits of the module;
  - “tool”—objective giving participants the knowledge they need to operate within the previously defined framework;

- “practice”—objective giving participants the opportunity to put their new knowledge into practice.
- formulation of the objective as it is presented to participants
- the teaching method used for the objective
- the anticipated length of the learning session
- references for purposes of recapitulation
- a link to the next objectives.

At the end of each module, the instructors will describe actual cases from their own experience and analyse them together with the course participants.

Participants have access to a number of reference works to help them solve problems. Where possible, links will be established with Internet databases.

The course material constitutes a set of inter-related educational objectives. This manual offers insight into the logic underlying the selection of educational objectives and their sequence.

Participants will evaluate the course after each module using several criteria: to what degree the material presented meets their expectations, the quality of the educational media used, and the instructors’ motivation and credibility. Another more general evaluation is carried out at the end of the course to rate the choice of modules, their sequence, and the relative emphasis they are given.

The participants’ achievements are evaluated in several ways:

- a multiple-choice test is used to determine what they have learned
- to evaluate their ability to make correct decisions in a given context, they are asked to write a summary report on the simulation, analysing the problems and proposing solutions
- their behaviour is evaluated on the basis of their participation in discussions and their ability to work as part of a team in their respective work groups.

This manual is designed to help the instructors of the HELP course understand the philosophy, educational goals, and teaching method of the course. We hope it will help them make sense of the complex assemblage of elements that constitutes a relief operation, and integrate their contributions harmoniously. It will also provide a basis of discussion for a working group charged with the task of regularly updating the objectives of the course to reflect new public-health developments in emergency situations.