D47 Ready for the Olympics? Disaster Victim Identification Training and Exercises as Part of a Capacity Building Process for UK Police Forces

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the educational philosophy and practical implications of uses of experiential learning for training and exercising in Disaster Victim Identification (DVI). Attendees will learn how the creation of scenarios that replicate, as far as is possible, key elements of a mass fatality incident will enable responders to develop the necessary skills in a controlled and educational environment.
This presentation will impact the forensic science community by presenting a systematic educational philosophy applied in police DVI exercises designed to prepare United Kingdom (UK) police forces for the London Olympics 2012.

Introduction: Following the Asian tsunami and large scale multi-centre terrorist attacks such as 9/11 and the London bombings of July 2005, DVI preparedness has been reviewed in many countries. Such reviews have covered various aspects of DVI, including team composition, local, regional, and national organization systems, inter- and intra-agency communication and co-operation, together with training and exercising.

DVI team members are drawn from a wide range of disciplines and can be broadly divided into two elements: (1) the scientific team members, such as forensic pathologists, anthropologists, odontologists, radiographers, mortuary technologists, laboratory officers, etc.; and (2) police officers or other emergency service responders. Whatever the structure and composition, it is essential that the DVI team members should be adequately trained and should have taken part in regular and comprehensive multidisciplinary exercises.

All team members typically perform their normal day-to-day role within a controlled environment. They will work with other professionals who understand their role and contribution to routine investigation. In a mass fatality incident, this will not be so; the situation will be unfamiliar and traumatic. Team members will need to act with confidence and speed and be mindful of the situation unfolding around them. The use of simulation training in a true multidisciplinary team environment helps team members gain first-hand experience of a realistic mass fatality situation, to plan and to understand the implications and limitations of their actions, and develop the necessary skills for disaster response within a controlled situation. By creating a simulated mass fatality incident in which all the elements of emergency forensic response are represented, team members can experience first-hand the multi-faceted challenges presented by such a situation. They can develop and try out their own strategies for overcoming practical and organizational challenges in a learning environment, supported by a team of experienced tutors. By use of multi-disciplinary training exercises, students gain understanding of the challenges faced by other professionals and learn to adopt a team approach to solving practical problems to achieve a common objective.

The Inforce Foundation has systematically applied the educational philosophy of experiential learning to a system of exercising that uses low-tech simulations in a number of different scenarios, ranging from mass grave excavations to mass fatality incident mortuary operations.

This presentation will concentrate on a series of simulation exercises that Inforce carried out with a number of UK police forces over the past four years. Most of these police hosted various aspects of the Olympic Games 2012. The exercises were designed to be flexible enough fit the precise needs of each force in question and work with their already existing level of qualifications and experience. By taking account of these variables, each exercise was tailored in terms of role distribution, rotation, difficulty level, and the elements of DVI operations to be included.

Results: Through these exercises, team members learned to:

- Understand the scope of a mass fatality incident.
- Adapt to changing circumstances.
- Develop the confidence to perform in different roles in the team.
- Contribute effectively to the team effort.
- Have consideration for the safety of self and others.
- Develop the confidence and skills to train other team members.
- Participate in the identification process.

Conclusion: There is no way to prepare adequately for a mass fatality incident as each and every incident will be different. However, such simulation exercises assist team members to prepare for, and adapt to, any situation as it unfolds, and to act professionally and confidently as part of a multidisciplinary team.

Capacity Building, DVI Exercise, Mass Fatality Incident

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