Nursing-2013
OMICS Group Conferences
Accelerating Scientific Discovery
International Conference on
Nursing & Emergency Medicine
December 2-4, 2013 Las Vegas, USA

Mass gathering health care and disaster management in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Introduction: The world is witnessing an increase in the number and varieties of mass gathering event, crowed accidents and natural and man-made disasters. These are associated with well-defined environment, health and related affects both acute and long term.

Mass gathering and disasters health care and management is evolving as a well-defined specialty or area of interest not only to public health and emergency medicine specialists but extending to a variety of other specialists like internists, surgeons, pediatricians, family physicians and to pharmacists, paramedics like nursing, emergency and medical assistants.

Mass Gathering in Saudi Arabia: The annual Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, is among the largest mass gatherings in the world. Hajj draws about 3 million Muslims from around the world each year during the last five years. Umrah is a similar pilgrimage that can be undertaken at any time of the year, but it is likely to be more crowded during the month of Ramadan than at other times of the year.

Over the years, Hajj has been a major public health challenge that required an undivided attention from a number of governmental and non-governmental sectors in Saudi Arabia. The MOH has a fundamental mission during the Hajj season stating:

1. Provision of the best health care for pilgrims.
2. Continuous expansion of health facilities.
3. Assignment of qualified health personnel.
4. Making effort to avoid bottle neck at health facilities.
5. Setting “Emergency or Disaster Plans” in coordination with other relevant sectors.
6. Protection of the people resident in Saudi Arabia against the potential risk factors or diseases.

The sectors that collaborate with the MOH include the National Guard Health Affairs, Red Crescent, Civil Defense, Medical Department at Ministry of Interior and others. All sectors work in a multidisciplinary team approach to cover the preventive, curative and promotion of health needs of the pilgrims and to achieve stated objectives.

The crowds, mass gatherings such as Hajj and Umrah are associated with unique health risks.

The accumulated management experience and health care delivery during such events justify establishing a well-structured training program. The intended program shall fulfill such needs and exceeds the local interest and experiences to regional and international dimensions.

Biography

Tagwa Omer completed her Ph.D. on Nursing and Certification on Quality Improvement and Outcome Management in 2005 from George Mason University, Fairfax, VA. She is working now as the Dean of the College of Nursing-Jeddah at King Saud Bin Abdul Aziz University for Health Sciences, National Guard Health Affairs (NGHA), Saudi Arabia. At the same time, she holds the post of chairperson of the Saudi Nursing Board at the Saudi Commission for Health Specialties. She has published 4 papers in reputed journals.

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