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Making First Aid More Accessible During Mass-Casualty Incidents


Cees van Romburgh

The Netherlands Red Cross, cvanromburgh@redcross.nl

Annemarie Mars

Safety Region IJsselland, a.mars@vrijsselland.nl

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Making First Aid More Accessible During Mass-Casualty Incidents

Cees van Romburgh & Annemarie Mars

The Netherlands

Here's what we're doing:

The Safety Region of IJsselland (www.in-prep.eu/srij/) together with the Netherlands Red Cross, developed a skill focused workshop called ‘Lifesaving Acts,’ and then offered it freely to its citizens. Participants learn how to react in the critical moments following a mass casualty incident (MCI), while they are waiting emergency medical services (EMS) to arrive, through an engaging workshop. Participants are not measured on their level of competence, but instead given a certificate of attendance. The main message of the workshops is to teach citizens that they can play an important role in being part of lifesaving situations by initiating basic skills to the injured: trying to get as many people to safety before administering more complex first aid, and teaching participants that if there is a crisis, every minute counts.

The workshop teaches (see supplemental files) how people can respond in case of emergency through video recordings from recent MCI-situations, processing emotional and physical reactions, 4-steps of first aid- with practice in small groups. They learn to retain self-control and to find a safe area before attempting to assist others and offer first aid if necessary. The workshop focuses on skills, for example: best ways to position or reposition an unresponsive ill/injured person to keep an open airway or how to stop a life-threatening bleed using a t-shirt or towel. The participants practice performing CPR on mannequins, but without the use of an AED to illustrate for participants that one can provide lifesaving skills without the use of first aid equipment.

This workshop developed from several European examples, including the French campaign “Samedi qui sauve.” This initiative of the Parisian city council and provided by the Fire Services, the French Red Cross and the Protection Civile, consisted of two-hour sessions, which ultimately trained 75,000 people in basic first aid (FranceSoir, 2016). Our workshop also benefited from the experiences of the British Red Cross’ “Skill and Will” in the “Everyday First Aid” courses that addressed the barriers for the willingness to help. When people are taught basic skills in a way in which they can retain and retrieve this skill knowledge, it has a direct impact on their willingness and ability to provide everyday first aid because its increased confidence (Oliver et al., 2014).

Educators received extra coaching from defense forces and ambulance services to learn how to manage first aid emergencies without specialized first aid tools. All sessions were taught at fire departments to keep costs low.

This is why we're doing it

Bystanders can play a vital role in delivering first aid prior to the arrival of emergency care. Therefore, it is particularly important for citizens to be well prepared. First aid training is a way to improve this initial

View from the field

response from bystanders (Van de Velde et al., 2009). After the terrorist attacks in France and Belgium in 2015 and 2016, many citizens followed a short first aid course to learn lifesaving acts (Carli et al., n.d.). This example initiated the Dutch governmental institutions and other organizations to start different initiatives to raise public awareness in case of an attack or other MCI. Through an online survey, the Netherlands Red Cross found that almost 50% of people were willing to help, of which only 45% felt able to provide first aid.

Questions for readers

Initial participation was high the first year across the community, while in year two it was less popular. A decision to use schools as an avenue to increase willingness to help other took shape.

- What are significant differences between community courses and those with exclusively youth?
- Is there a minimum age that young people are mature enough to deal with the reality of an MCI?

Approximately 2,100 people have attended so far, 95% have stated that they found the training to be relevant, 80% have said they feel like they could handle an emergency and 20% have expressed an interest in taking further first aid courses (n = 210, Persons 14 – 75 years). Compared to another 2.5 hours standard Red Cross workshop “first aid for babies and children” the Safety Region measured almost the same results.

- Can we conclude that short courses with very basic first aid increases the willingness to help?

Other questions from the authors:

- How could we adapt it to a different population group?
- What other activities could we add in to make this engaging to children?

To engage

Consider tweeting a response to @ijfaeducation

Emailing the authors: Cees van Romburgh, cvanromburgh@redcross.nl or Annemarie Mars, a.mars@vrijsselland.nl

Contributing your field experience or commentary to editor@firstaid-revolution.org

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View from the field

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