

Injecting primary care into disaster health management

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The World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine (WADEM) Primary Care Special Interest Group (SIG) brings together researchers, educators, health practitioners and management personnel with interest and expertise in primary care during disasters.

The SIG was created after the 2019 WADEM Congress, where the inaugural ‘Primary care in disasters’ stream attracted primary care professionals from around the world. During this congress, general practitioners, nurses and pharmacists mixed with other disaster health responders and professionals to discuss better integration of local primary care health practitioners at the planning, preparing, responding and recovering phases of emergency events.

The group discussed examples of primary care at the 2019 WADEM Congress from the Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network in NSW that launched a new *Emergency preparedness guide for Primary Health Networks and others supporting the local General Practitioner Response during emergencies*. The Canterbury Primary Response Group from New Zealand provided an outline of their extensive preparedness and response

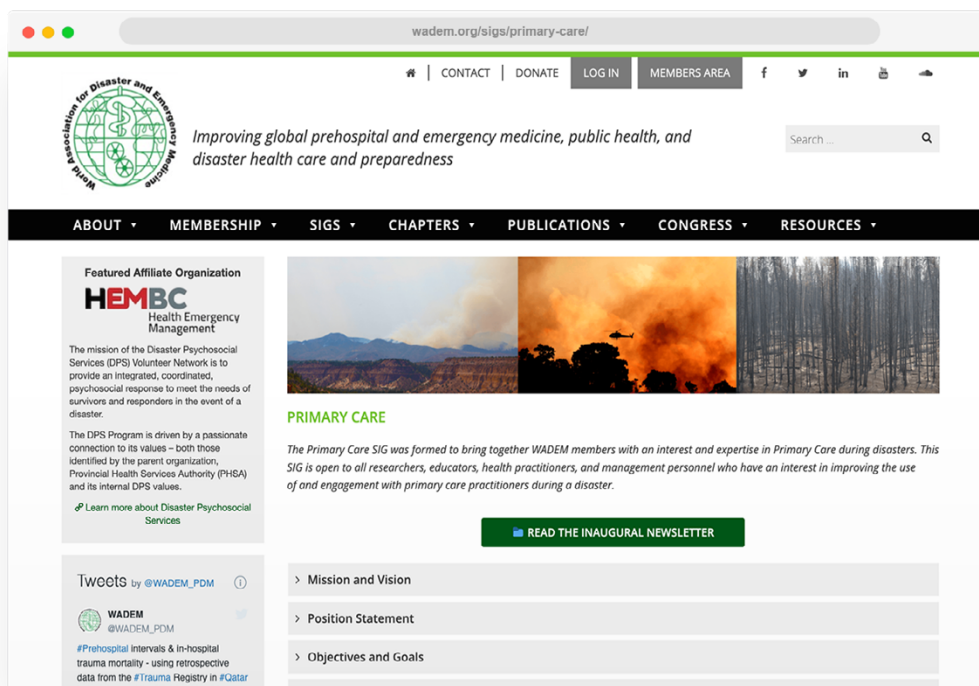
activities during the 2009 H1N1 pandemic as well as the response to the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes and the Christchurch Mosque shootings. From the Pacific Region, the Pasifika Medical Association presented their approach to integrate primary care in disaster planning.

The WADEM SIG facilitates the global exchange of information, experiences and strategies to strengthen healthcare provision so all levels of healthcare can effectively work together at a time when communities need it most. The group formed at a time when the world was experiencing its first stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 puts primary care in the frontline of the pandemic without adequate integration in pandemic response plans. This failure for primary care to be adequately integrated resulted in rapid adaptations that could have been better planned, discussed, and addressed in the earlier planning phases or even before the pandemic struck.



Dr Kaitlyn Watson and Dr Elizabeth McCourt at WADEM Congress and the launch of the Primary Care Special Interest Group.

Image: Dr Penelope Burns



WADEM website.

In Australia, two million consultations with general practitioners and 1.5 million presentations to pharmacists occur every week. This interface with the public puts primary care professionals in the frontline for surveillance and early identification of cases. People usually present with symptoms that could be clinically indistinguishable from seasonal influenza, rhinovirus (common cold) or hay fever. Thus, first contact triage and management is critical to the overall response to a pandemic.

In the current climate of stressed and strained health care professionals and working conditions, medical groups, including primary care groups, have freely shared their resources and experiences to assist in the global response. This helps to decrease the duplication of effort at a time of limited human resources. In particular, the Canterbury Primary Response Group experience of general practitioner respiratory clinics used in New Zealand during the 2009 H1N1 pandemic has been a contribution to our understanding in Australia where these clinics have not previously been used.

The newly launched WADEM Primary Care SIG will be a significant facilitator for support to primary care practitioners facing challenges during emergency events and an active advocate for greater integration of primary care into health management. The group will also provide up-to-date evidence-based online resources on their website for delivering and managing primary care during disasters. The SIG provides quarterly newsletters on primary care matters relating to disaster events and podcasts that are all accessible and on the website. The SIG will hold a

‘primary care’ stream at each biennial congress; the first official one being held in Tokyo at the WADEM 2021 congress. The WADEM Primary Care SIG invites others interested in disaster primary care to join the SIG and contribute to the discussions.

End notes

Wentworth Healthcare n.d., *Planning for Disaster Management. An emergency preparedness guide for Primary Health Networks and others supporting the local General Practitioner Response during emergencies*. At: www.nbmphn.com.au/Resources/About/268_0618-DisasterPlanning_F.aspx.

Royal Australian College of General Practitioners 2019, *General Health of the Nation 2019*. At: www.racgp.org.au/FSDEDEV/media/documents/Special%20events/Health-of-the-Nation-2019-Report.pdf.

The Pharmacy Guild of Australia n.d., *The nature, extent and impact of triage provided by community pharmacies in Victoria*. At: <http://6cpa.com.au/wp-content/uploads/The-Nature-Extent-and-Impact-of-Triage-Provided-By-Community-Pharmacy-in-Victoria-Full-Final-Report-.pdf>.

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