Emergency Medicine for Myanmar

A collaboration between Colleges helps Myanmar healthcare grow

Health authorities in Myanmar have requested international expertise and input to develop emergency medicine skills and systems in the lead up to the South East Asian Games to be held there in 2013.

In response, the College Council has approved a proposal by the International Committee for the RACS to work in collaboration with the Australasian College of Emergency Medicine (ACEM) and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists to provide initial training later this year.

The College’s new involvement in emergency medicine builds on the successful provision and delivery of 19 Primary Trauma Care (PTC) courses to Myanmar medical staff following the devastation wrought by Cyclone Nargis in 2008.

Professor David Watters, a College Councillor and Chairman of the International Committee and External Affairs, represented the RACS at the Myanmar Medical Association meeting held in January where the request for international assistance was made at an Emergency Medicine workshop opened by the Deputy Minister for Health. He said the request represented a golden opportunity to help develop healthcare in a country that has no emergency medicine specialty and where the vast majority of the population live on only $1 a day.

He said the College would seek AusAID funding to support the training program with financial support also being provided through the RACS Foundation.

“Malaysia has a population of 59 million yet there is no specialty of emergency medicine, no training and no specialty position in any hospital which is quite typical of a developing nation given that the specialty is relatively young, even in countries like Australia,” Professor Watters said.

More than trauma

“We believe the College can help in the development of emergency medicine as a natural progression from the provision of the PTC courses which began in 2009. That program, which was designed to train the trainers, has been extremely successful. So far 130 local faculty members have been trained under international supervision who have, in turn, trained more than 700 other medical staff.”

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Professor Watters said the aim of the workshop was to provide initial training later this year to Myanmar’s needs with regard to emergency patient care and emergency medicine.”

Professor Watters said the international push to develop the specialty was being led by Mr Tai Wai Wong, an emergency medicine specialist from Hong Kong, Mr James Kong, a RACS Fellow and PTC Project Director, Professor Peter Cameron, President of the International Federation of Emergency Medicine from Melbourne, Dr Steven Swallow, an Anaesthetist from Hobart, and himself.

He said Professor Zee Wai Soe, the local orthopaedic surgeon and trauma/collaborator leading much of the emergency medicine development, had strong ties with Australasian Fellows following a 2011 visit to Melbournes and Sydney emergency departments which was supported by the surgeons international fund. He said the RACS had chosen to lead the collaborative project because it was the only College to have a dedicated International Development department and because of the interest and commitment expressed by a number of Fellows wishing to help develop surgery and quality healthcare in Myanmar.

“Many of Fellows have gladly offered their time and services over recent years to provide the PTC courses and that contribution has been warmly received by local medical specialists,” Professor Watters said.

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Coordinated response

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Further at the conference in January we had a promising meeting with the Myanmar Medical Association for the first time last year with Michael Hollands attending on behalf of the President and it was an honour to represent the College at the meeting this year.

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With Karen Murphy

International Development

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