

**The Medical Response and Problems in 1999
Taiwan Earthquake**
Dr. Jih-Chang Chen

Theme 4. Effective Models for Medical and Health Response Coordination

Chairs: Dr. Eric Noji & Dr. SWA Gunn

Epidemiology in Disasters: Challenges for Public Health Action

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Better epidemiological knowledge of the causes of death and the types of medical and health problems (e.g., injuries and illnesses) caused by disasters clearly is essential to determine appropriate relief supplies, equipment, and personnel needed to respond effectively to such situations. The overall objective of disaster epidemiology is to measure scientifically and describe the health effects of disasters and contributing factors to these effects. The goals are to assess the needs of disaster-affected populations, efficiently match resources to needs, prevent adverse health effects, evaluate the effectiveness of relief programs, and plan for contingencies.

In addition, the epidemiologist has an important role in providing informed advice about the probable health effects that may arise in the future (both short-term and long-term), in establishing priorities for action, and in emphasizing the need for accurate and timely information as the basis for appropriate relief decisions. This presentation outlines a number of important areas in which epidemiologists can contribute to making disaster management and humanitarian assistance more effective.

Keywords: contingencies; decision-making; disasters; effectiveness; epidemiologist; epidemiology; health; information; planning; preparedness; priorities; relief