

WADEM Position Statement: Disaster Medicine Education in Health Care Profession Training

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Abbreviation:

WADEM: World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine

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Abstract

Disaster Medicine is a critical and often neglected component of health care. The World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine (WADEM) Board of Directors, as well as the WADEM Student and Young Professional Special Interest Group, recognize the importance of introducing Disaster Medicine concepts early in health care education and have put forth a position statement emphasizing this importance. As leaders in Disaster Medicine, we aim to highlight the need for the integration of Disaster Medicine education into health care profession training. By acknowledging this educational need and by providing recommendations to appropriate stakeholders, we anticipate that this investment in Disaster Medicine education will assist in developing well-prepared health care professionals who will improve prehospital and emergency medicine, public health, and day-to-day health care throughout local and global communities.

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Editorial

Disaster Medicine is a critical and often neglected component of health care, especially as the incidence of natural and human-induced disasters is increasing globally.¹ Since the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States cities of New York City and Washington, DC, there have been numerous proposals and attempts for the standardization and implementation of disaster response and mass-casualty education into health care training across many countries.^{2–4}

Despite these efforts in the early 2000s, Disaster Medicine has not been incorporated into many national standards across health care professional training programs, nor has it yet been acknowledged as a foundational component of all health care roles.⁵ The rigor of existing academic requirements and lack of resources have made incorporating Disaster Medicine into the formal curriculum challenging.^{6,7} The majority of students and trainees who receive education related to Disaster Medicine do so as part of optional extracurricular activities that are driven by individual interests.^{4,5} As such, many practitioners enter professional careers with little exposure to Disaster Medicine.

The lack of preparedness among health care professionals is concerning because communities turn to their health care providers regularly for guidance, especially during public health emergencies.^{2,8} Introducing Disaster Medicine concepts early in health care education will allow students and trainees to feel more comfortable implementing these practices when called upon as future leaders. Disaster Medicine education encompasses competencies including leadership, critical thinking, interprofessional collaboration, and communication skills that are necessary for the everyday practice of health care and will assist in developing well-rounded health care providers.⁸

As a result, the World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine (WADEM):

- Recognizes the need to improve the quality, quantity, and accessibility of Disaster Medicine education, which may be achieved with a dedicated curriculum at all levels of health care education.
- Urges for standardizing Disaster Medicine education across universities and health care training programs.
- Recommends that Disaster Medicine education be delivered in a multisession, multimodal format that includes didactic-, simulation-, and interprofessional-based endeavors.

- Suggests that universities and health care training programs incorporate faculty and community organizations well-versed in Disaster Medicine preparedness and response to improve existing Disaster Medicine curricula.
- Encourages medical education accrediting bodies, education advocacy organizations, and similar stakeholders to prioritize Disaster Medicine education within their initiatives and standards.
- Endorses that Disaster Medicine education activities should be continually evaluated and modified to align with the needs of the local and global communities.
- Acknowledges the need for further research to better understand Disaster Medicine education in non-physician health care roles.

Adopted by the World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine (WADEM) Board of Directors on July 30, 2024.

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