

CORONASYS WORKSHOP SERIES

Addressing the corona pandemic in Armenia through systemic risk management

WORKSHOP 1: Addressing a Twindemic. Pandemic preparedness in the health sector and beyond

Rationale

The CoronaSys workshop series brings together international experts to exchange experiences, discuss gaps and challenges, and ponder on joint questions concerning the response to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. Particular emphasis is put on medical solutions, technological innovations, and socio-political policies, as well as on the identification of best practices for prevention, detection, containment, and treatment. Reflecting on the pandemic from a whole-of-society perspective, the aim is to create a thought forum on strategies for systemic pandemic and risk management.

The workshops are organized by the Academy of the Disaster Research Unit, associated with the Disaster Research Unit at the Free University of Berlin. They are part of the research project "CoronaSys: Addressing the corona pandemic in Armenia through systemic risk management", sponsored by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The workshop protocols offer insights on the conversational course with an emphasis on key points. All participants are granted the opportunity to review and comment on the draft version of the workshop protocols prior to their publication.

Workshop № 01, date: 16 Sept. 2020

Workshop Topic:

Addressing a Twindemic: Pandemic preparedness in the health sector and beyond

Covid-19 posed a major challenge to many (health) systems and brought some of them to the brink of collapse when the so-called "first wave" of the pandemic hit. Not only did they have to respond to new problems and requirements, the pandemic often revealed long-standing weaknesses in existing (health) systems and shortcomings in disaster preparedness.

Many experts fear a double burden if the Covid-19 pandemic coincides with the annual seasonal flu waves in the winter season 2020/2021.

At the same time, the question arises as to what lessons can be learned from past experience with the pandemic and how it can help to better meet future challenges.

- How can health facilities prepare for a possible second wave of Covid-19, future pandemics, and the possible scenario of a "twindemic" (Covid-19 and Influenza)?
- How can health facilities enhance their capacities and improve their preparedness and response strategies in the short and long term?
- How can pandemic preparedness be integrated into other areas of expertise (e.g. civil protection, urban planning, financing, ...)?

- (How) can Covid- 19 foster the development of a systemic and cross-sectoral approach to disaster preparedness?

Key highlights

- Small hospitals need to be part of a wider system with strong links to local services and support from other hospitals and specialist centers
- Tabletop exercises can help to dry run pandemic scenarios and amend the preparedness plans accordingly
- Pandemics are not just a hospital/health sector concern but affect a broad range of sectors. Alarm and emergency response plans need to address further external and internal threats
- Communication and information flow between stakeholders is crucial to coordinate and ensure a timely and effective response

Detailed notes

- Welcome notice: there are two main objectives of this cooperation; first to establish a network for addressing and researching into the ongoing pandemic; second to identify relevant topics for a longer-term research project on systemic risk management
- Round of introduction (please refer to the list of participants below)
- Introduction into the topic (see above)

Statements

- **UNDP's experience and work in Armenia regarding SARS-CoV-2**
 - The current pandemic is not only a health emergency but also a socio-economic emergency
 - UNDP's experience and work in Armenia and the region: immediate response and longer-term recovery programs (social protection, green economy, and resilience, governance, etc.) to support countries in their Covid response in the areas of preparation, response, and recovery.
 - Particularly the procurement of PPE has been a major challenge in the first weeks of the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - The UNDP helped countries across the key sectors to slow the spread of the virus using a "whole of government- whole of society" approach.
 - UNDP helps the countries to assess the socio-economic impact of Covid and assists them in minimizing this impact. Inclusive and integrated crisis management and response, as well as social and economic impact and needs assessment, are priorities.
- **Experiences of Charité University Hospital with the COVID-19 pandemic**
 - Charité's original pandemic preparedness plan was written in preparation for an influenza epidemic/pandemic twelve years ago.
 - Since the end of Jan. 2020, the Charité started with a pandemic task force (incl. representatives from infectiology, virology, hygiene, nursing, press office, infrastructure, and the medical as well as pandemic managers) meeting each weekday; additionally, a daily briefing of the management

board of the Charité took place in the first weeks of the pandemic. Now both teams are meeting twice a week.

- It was very important to work closely together as pandemic task force with the crisis and disaster manager
- information and numbers were gathered in dashboards (e.g. Covid-19 cases, overall hospitalized cases, cases in the Charité hospital, available beds, occupied intensive care unit beds, recovery rates, testing capacity, conducted tests, location of Covid-19 patients in the hospital, etc.) → a regular exchange and overview of information is very crucial for managing the pandemic and preparing for further developments
- Small hospitals need to be part of a wider system, with strong links to local services and support from other hospitals – in particular specialist centers that can provide advanced care. This needs to be formalized and in a much more reliable way than often is the case.
- The ARDS-ECMO network was created to centrally coordinate all ICU beds for Covid-19 patients (and patients with acute respiratory failure due to other diseases) in the region Berlin and Brandenburg. There is a 24/7h phone number for other hospitals to call into the coordinating hospital.
- Good interaction between level 1, 2, and 3 hospitals is crucial (“SAVE”-concept): the containment strategy is to treat the patient as long as possible in the local hospital but if necessary timely transfer that patient to a level 1 hospital/ specialist center. → this is supported by a telemedicine system (ERIC) which assists clinicians in deciding when to transfer the patient to a specialist center
- **How does the Charité prepare for the second wave of a pandemic?**
 - Charité changed an administration building into a hospital building with 73 ICU-beds ready (incl. ventilators), which is currently not in use but ready if necessary
 - To increase staff capacity for Covid response, elective operations are reduced if necessary
 - Monitoring and scenario planning of Covid cases and hospital beds in Berlin: Based on the Covid cases and the number of daily admissions and current occupied ICU beds, estimates of the future occupancy of ICU beds are conducted
 - Measures for pandemics and a twindemic are quite similar in general
 - Monitoring of the workforce is crucial; there is a daily updated monitoring about how many people are at work and call in sick; the incidence rate among hospital staff is monitored daily; there are free Covid testing units for hospital staff
 - SAVE-network to coordinate among different hospitals supported by telemedicine
- Both Influenza and Covid-19 are similar when it comes to the preparedness approach with the exception that there is a vaccine for Influenza but not Covid-19 yet;
- The treatment does not differ much between critically ill patients who suffer from influenza or Covid-19
- Charité is a hospital with good access to resources but the principle should work also in hospitals with fewer resources; the crucial point is to know what is going on and monitoring well since the situation in many countries follows quite similar principles

- **UNDP Armenia's socio-economic impact assessment**
 - A detailed socio-economic impact assessment was conducted by UNDP in Armenia → the socio-economic impact assessment recommendations are used by the government to adjust their Covid strategy
- **Often overlooked issues regarding pandemic preparedness of health facilities**
 - The main focus of discussion is on not overburdening the hospitals but we have to also look at a different point:
 - Due to economic shut-down, hospitals may also experience supply shortages or reduced availability or disruptions of services (e.g. laundry, catering, cleaning, security services, water supply, wastewater management, electricity, IT, etc.)
 - therefore hospitals need to take such shortages into account and plan for them accordingly in their alarm and emergency response plans
 - Table-top exercises can help to simulate scenarios and prepare accordingly
 - The hospitals' alarm and emergency response plans have to be updated yearly
 - One needs to also discuss ahead of time how nursing services can be reduced without compromising the health for those in care
 - A big challenge is that services and capacities may be reduced in a pandemic due to e.g. infections in the service companies and closed schools/kindergartens, alarm and emergency response plans need to cover internal and external issues
- **Priorities of Disaster Risk Reduction during the pandemic**
 - The Disaster Risk Reduction National Platform Armenia provides a multi-disciplinary perspective on disaster risk reduction and assists as well as advisers in the implementation of the national disaster risk management strategy
 - Due to the pandemic, the priorities of ARNAP have been changed: recommendations for hospital preparedness were developed; school Disaster Risk Management plans were developed etc.

Follow-ups for further conversations

- A major aspect for our project could be to include hospital exercises in order to increase resilience and preparedness to internal and external risks
- A few issues require improvement in Armenia but probably also in other countries: coordination between government and major agencies and communication between responders, government, and the general public → it is important to mobilize public efforts and to avoid panic in terms of the development in the pandemic
- Idea for new workshop topic:
 - how to maintain ICU and medical devices that may not be used on a day to day basis after the current pandemic in order for them to be ready and functioning for the future emergencies
 - Learn more about hospital structures and interactions in Armenia and out-patient management (hospital, outpatient, public health)

- Innovative methods of public health in the protection of children and public health, e.g. new cleaning methods and implementation experiences, the impact of the use of masks e.g. in schools etc.

Annexes:

Workshop Participants

We thank all 23 participants for their time and valuable contributions.

Represented institutions in the expert dialogue

- Academy of the Disaster Research Unit, Germany
- Disaster Research Unit, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany
- Charité Universitätsmedizin, Germany
- Crisis Management State Academy of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Republic of Armenia (CMSAA)
- Dräger Safety AG & Co. KGaA, Germany
- Disaster Risk Reduction National Platform of the Republic of Armenia (ARNAP)
- Disaster Research Unit, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany
- International Search and Rescue (I.S.A.R.) Germany
- Ministry of Emergency Situations in Armenia, National Sendai Focal Point Armenia
- Prepared International, Germany
- Federal Agency of Technical Relief (THW), Germany
- United Nations Development Programme Armenia
- United Nations Development Programme Regional Office

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