



Secretary General's Message on World Health Day

On 26th January 2001 Bhuj and surrounding areas were rocked by a devastating earthquake. The number of casualties started rising every hour. The only local hospital and the primary health centers in the area were badly damaged and the medical facilities came to a stand still. The Government airlifted medical teams but there were no equipped safe buildings where they could perform their duties. During this chaos the Red Cross Society was able to erect and operate three hospitals, one of them with four hundred beds, brought from Spain, Norway and Finland, which became operational during the first 72 hours of the earthquake.

In times of emergencies the injured and survivors find solace only when they are taken to a hospital where the medical facilities and health care is available. It is here that the injured patient sees a ray of hope for his survival.

Damage to health systems during disasters badly impact the economic and social life of the country. The inability of the damaged health facilities to provide timely assistance to disaster victims leaves the population insecure and neglected. Studies conducted after a disaster have shown that structural retrofitting and non-structural measures can save lives and significantly increase the reliability of health services at a time when they are most needed.

The rapid urbanization and migration are themselves looming emergencies for the environment and its inhabitants; climate change, where there is no predictable scenario, will also require health facilities to perform during extreme weather events.

To address this World Health Organization has selected '*Save lives: make hospitals safe in emergencies*' the theme for this year's World Health Day. It is a call that the health sector needs to address.

As an auxiliary agency to the government and armed forces medical services, IRCS has been complimenting health sector disaster preparedness initiatives in the country. Focus has been on voluntary donor recruitment for blood, enhancing the first aid capacities of volunteers, supplement and complement the services provided in hospitals such as assistance and counselling to patients, helping run rehabilitation centres, help to poor patients in their treatment etc. In addition efforts are on for safe and timely transportation of victims to the hospitals to reduce mortality.

The Government has envisaged *National Highway Trauma Care Project* to upgrade trauma care facilities of 200 hospitals located in high disaster vulnerability zones and provide them with advanced pre-hospital care ambulance services and mobile hospitals with facilities for operation theatres, pathology labs, imaging units and other support functions. IRCS has an opportunity to pitch in with its volunteers for the success of this initiative. Similarly, the National Disaster Management Authority issued comprehensive guidelines on Earthquake Risk Management and Medical Preparedness and Mass Casualty Management. These guidelines have prescribed retrofitting of all life line structures. Hospitals figure on top of this list.

IRCS is running a one year Post Graduate Diploma Course in Disaster Preparedness and Rehabilitation since 2006 wherein the students cover topics relating to safe hospitals and practices which relate to the theme for this year. The Society is starting 100 hours of voluntary service scheme and road safety project, which are in line with the overall Government vision to bring medical care at the doorsteps of the community.

On this occasion I appeal to all the officers, members and volunteers of the Society to contribute in every possible way in saving precious human lives by making our health sector safe in all respects.

Dr. S.P. Agarwal
Secretary General