



Abstracts of WHO Emergency Medical Teams Global Meeting 2024

EDITORIAL

Strengthening research and evidence across the Emergency Medical Teams (EMT) initiative

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The purpose of the WHO EMT initiative is to strengthen healthcare surge capacities and systems, particularly at local and national levels, for more effective response to health emergencies, and to improve the timeliness and quality of health care provided to people and communities during disasters, disease outbreaks, armed conflicts, and other emergencies.¹ This is realized through three core areas of work: standard setting and quality assurance, training and capacity-building, and emergency coordination and response. Underpinning all three areas is the need for quality research and evidence, which are essential for guiding policies and practices and for continuous improvement.

In recognizing the criticality of research and to galvanize efforts, strengthening research and evidence has been set as one of four strategic objectives of the global EMT 2030 strategy.¹ The defined indicator and global target for this objective is the doubling of available scientific literature and evidence on/for EMTs, as measured by number of published research articles, by 2030. Strengthening research and evidence also crucially contributes to the achievement of the other three objectives. This includes: generating EMT health impact data to bolster advocacy, commitments and investments in building EMT surge capacities (Strategic Objective 1); conducting operational and implementation research, which can encompass after-action reviews and monitoring, evaluation and learning, to enhance approaches to national EMT development, training, response operations, and coordination (Strategic Objectives 2 and 3); and expanding and synthesizing evidence to inform EMT technical standards and guidelines (Strategic Objective 3).

Research for and in health emergencies is challenging. The EMT initiative has the comparative advantage of being able to leverage not only the technical, normative and convening functions of WHO, but also the wide-reaching and diverse EMT network with entities ranging from academic institutions and collaborating centres to frontline EMT organizations and national health authorities. This provides ample opportunities for both research generation and utilization, including across different contexts. The diverse entities of the EMT network also cover all stages of the knowledge-to-practice pathway. This facilitates the cascading of evidence from research into

standards and guidelines into local adaptation and implementation into training into response operations, and ultimately, into improved care and outcomes for crisis-affected populations.

The EMT initiative has and continues to establish different avenues to promote and strengthen research. This includes: convening a working group for EMT research agenda-setting; capacitating EMTs with research skills through an EMT-Structured Operational Research and Training Initiative (SORT IT) collaboration; establishing regional EMT training and knowledge hubs; developing EMT minimum data sets; promoting digitalization and integrated information management; and incorporating systematic reporting and learning into EMT operations as part of core standards². The planned establishment of a joint WHO EMT and World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine (WADEM) Community of Practice for EMT research will further enhance collaborative capacities and synergistic action.

On top of these activities, the EMT Global Meetings form a crucial platform for the promotion, exchange and advancement of research and knowledge for the EMT initiative. Building on the success of the previous Global Meeting, this year's meeting in Abu Dhabi saw a 25% increase in research abstract submissions with over 140 accepted for oral or poster presentation. Only a proportion of these could be included in this supplement, for which abstracts with research and findings of most direct relevance to EMTs have been prioritized. Additionally, in line with WHO's strengthened focus on health equity in its science, innovation and evidence-generation work for its Fourteenth General Programme of Work, 2025–2028³, this year's Global Meeting featured a dedicated session highlighting research from lesser represented contexts and localities. This diversity is reflected in the included abstracts. Abstract themes this year were: policy, standard setting, capacity building and training, emergency response and operations, monitoring and evaluation, and interoperability. These are the categories by which the array of impactful research – ranging from strategies for sustainable development of national EMTs to response operations in Türkiye, Tuvalu, Ukraine, and others, to innovative applications of tools such as artificial intelligence – is arranged in this supplement. These works also represent a synopsis of the achievements of the EMT community. We thank everyone for their contributions and ongoing efforts, and look forward to further advancements in EMT research and innovation for the next Global Meeting in line with the ambitious EMT 2030 objectives.

References

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