Health Care Crisis Management: Combatting Ebola in Sierra Leone

“Our team has implemented a structured, incremental approach to bringing the Ebola Treatment Centre up to capacity. This incremental approach is regarded as best practice.”

Glenn Keys
Executive Director of Aspen Medical

Aspen Medical

Objectives:
• To be the world leader in the delivery of healthcare solutions
• To ensure a complete focus on client’s needs
• To be focussed on the outcome of all client’s projects

Aspen Medical Point of Difference:
• Access to market
• Competitive differentiation
• Increased brand reputation through certification (ISO 9001, ISO 14001, AS/NZS 4801)
• Process improvements via an effective ISO 9001 Quality Management System
Background

Aspen Medical is an Australian-owned provider of global health care solutions. Founded in 2003, the company provides international leadership in a range of critical health scenarios, delivering innovative services across a range of sectors including oil and gas, defence, government and humanitarian. Their procedures and processes are underpinned by a state-of-the-art management system that is regarded as being among the most effective in the health care sector.

Preparation and Deployment

The 2014 Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone resulted in an international mobilisation of health care organizations as part of a global effort to stop the spread of disease. In November 2014, the Australian Government called on Aspen Medical's strong track record in health care crisis management, commissioning a unit for deployment to Sierra Leone. The Aspen Medical team commenced rapid recruitment of health and administrative personnel, setting up a task force and a project management team to liaise with Aspen’s international government and health care colleagues, including the UK’s ministry and defence departments, the Sierra Leone Government, international NGO counterparts and the World Health Organization. These teams were also tasked with finalising the deployment details and managing administrative issues on the ground in what was known as the 'hot zone' of Sierra Leone.

Aspen’s health care staff undertook two weeks of intensive training in Canberra prior to departure, working with emergency response physicians, nurses, medical practitioners and environmental health officers to build a robust understanding of the Ebola environment. The company’s extensive experience in health care crisis management provided a foundation for a fast and effective deployment, with a health care team commencing operations in Sierra Leone on 14 December 2014.

Challenges

The learning curve in the hot zone was steep. Ebola was an unknown for many health care workers; until the outbreak in 2014, there had only ever been 20 reported cases, and there was very little research to support treatment and cure. The most pressing issue was the management of risk around Ebola infection; according to Médecins Sans Frontières, more than 20 per cent of health care workers treating patients in Sierra Leone contracted the disease. Language and cultural barriers, coupled with an unfamiliar environment, added to the complexity of the situation. The Aspen Medical team relied heavily on their pre-deployment training and on established relationships with international NGO and government partners to familiarise themselves with the situation on the ground. They also adhered to rigorous operational procedures that had been put in place to keep health care staff safe, including the use of personal protective equipment and extensive decontamination procedures at the end of each shift.

Achievements

The Aspen Medical team achieved significant health care outcomes during their time in Sierra Leone, assisting over 200 patients and providing a cure for 36. Despite their proximity to Ebola, not a single staff member was infected with the disease. This result demonstrated both the efficacy of Aspen’s pre-deployment training, as well as staff members’ commitment to established safety procedures. The company’s robust management system and quality assurance protocols ensured both clinicians and administrators were well prepared for the challenges they faced.

Moving Forward

BSI has worked with Aspen Medical since 2006, delivering certification for standards including ISO 9001, ISO 14001 and AS/NZS 4801. This longstanding relationship supports the Aspen Medical team to achieve high quality outputs, improve operational standards and reduce professional risk.

As of July 2015, the Aspen Medical core team was commissioned by the UK Government to be based in West Africa to support health professionals working in the Ebola prevention program.

A review of the Aspen Medical experience is still underway with international partners and the World Health organization.

For further information about BSI training, visit our website at: bsigroup.com/en-au/training