

WHO Conference on Health Aspects of Tsunami Disaster in Asia

**Phuket, Thailand
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Health Protection and Disease Prevention: a Critical Review of Experience – The International Perspective

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Health Protection Agency

- Specialist independent public organisation
- Established by the UK Government in April 2003
- Remit to co-ordinate and provide health protection services across the United Kingdom
- Deals with all health protection threats.



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Health protection - Definition

- Preventing and controlling infectious diseases,
- Reducing the adverse effect of chemical, microbiological and radiological hazards
- Preparing for potential or emerging threats to health,
- Preparing for and responding to emergencies

Regan M. J Epidemiol Community Health 1999; 53: 517-8



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Eight Themes of the Talk

- Good objective intelligence & needs assessment are key
- Infections are potentially a major threat
- Good surveillance and early response saves lives
- Evidence based interventions and use of previous experience are vital
- Psychological sequelae are inevitable, including among the responders but can be reduced
- Build on what you have already (rather than creating new structures)
- Learn from experience and practice beforehand when you can
- Anticipate the expected, but be prepared to be surprised

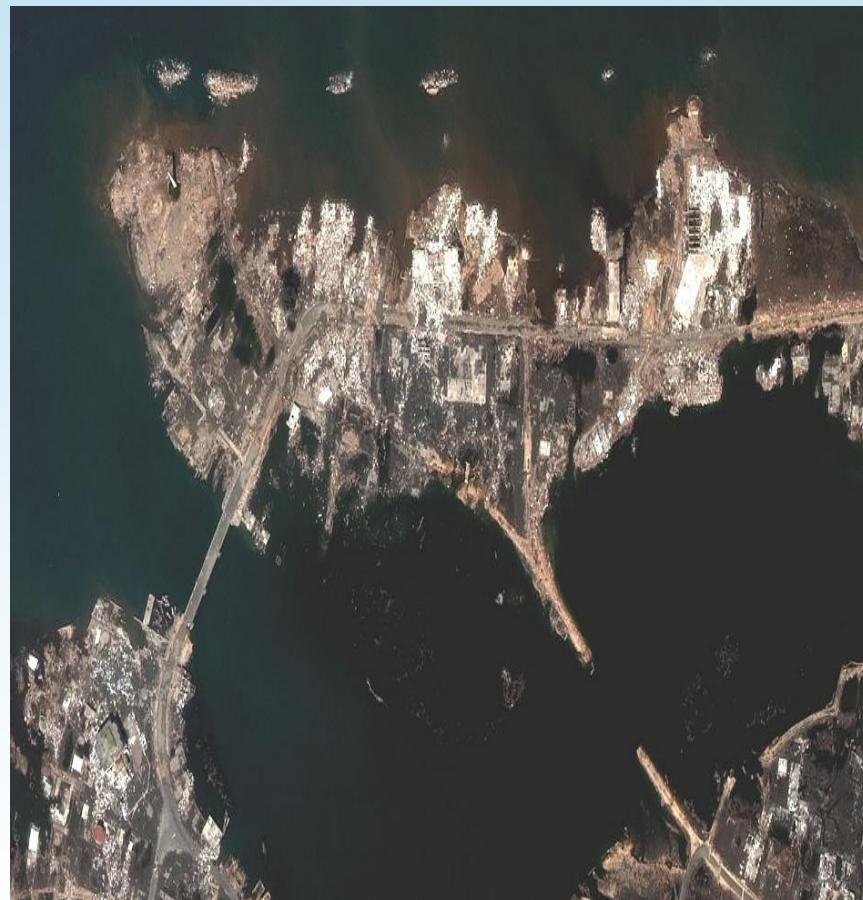


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Good objective intelligence & needs assessment are key

- Impression of overwhelming need
- Many UK volunteers
- Rapid WHO needs assessment
- Placement of specialist staff
- Effective work



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HPA – Contributions to the International Response



- Planning – SEARO
- Infection surveillance Banda Aceh
- Specialist advice and studies concerning management of dead bodies
- Personal volunteer Sri Lanka



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Infections are potentially a major threat



Good surveillance and early response saves

- UK 1980s
- HIV & AIDS
- Early multisectoral response
- Political commitment
- Highly effective

Nicoll A et al, Sex Transmitted Infections 2001 77: 242-247 ■

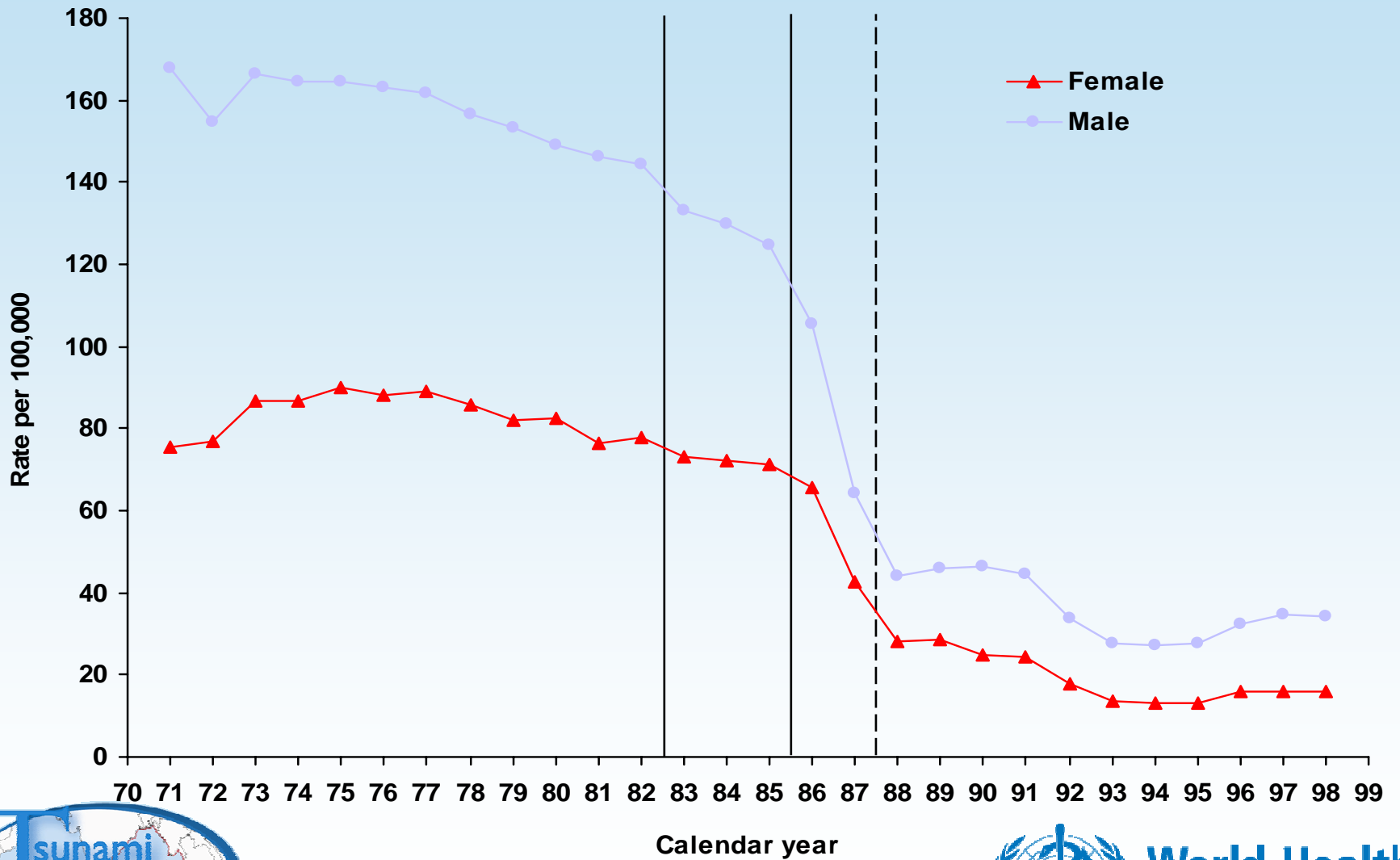


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England & Wales: Gonorrhoea in men and women 1970-1999



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“Health is too important to be left to Ministries of Health – well Ministries of health alone”



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Be Evidence and Experience Based – Example Dead Bodies

Myth - Epidemics and plagues are inevitable after every disaster.

Epidemics do not spontaneously occur after a disaster and dead bodies will not lead to catastrophic outbreaks of exotic diseases. The key to preventing disease is to improve sanitary conditions and education of the public.



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Psychological Sequelae



Build on what you have already



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Learn from experience and practice beforehand

Example – Hurricanes in the West
Indies



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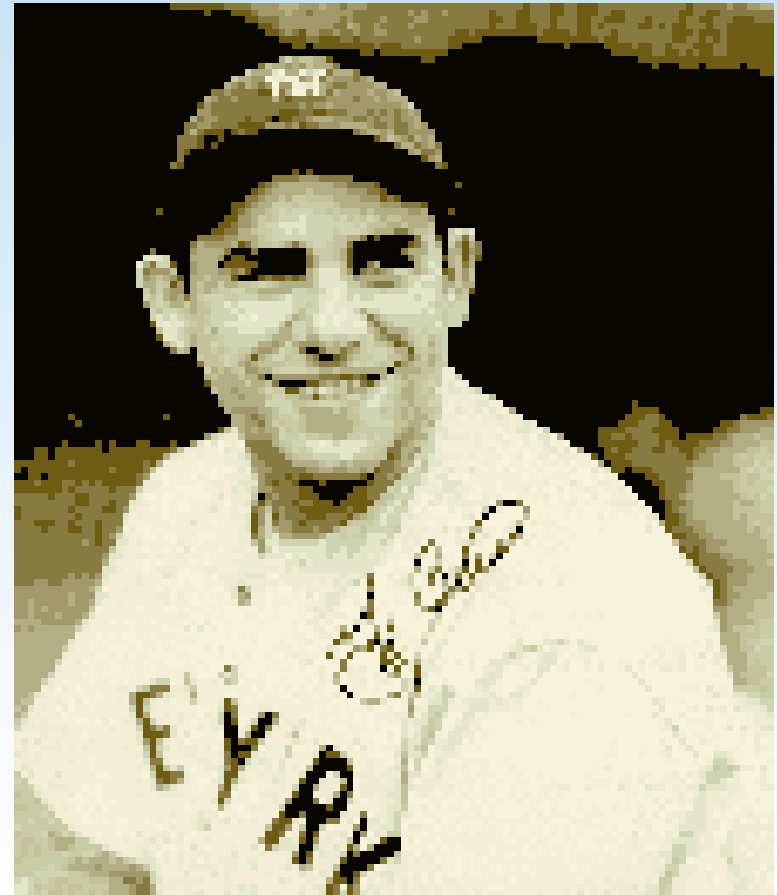


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Anticipate the expected, but be prepared to be surprised

“It is difficult to make predictions, especially about the future”

Yogi Berra
Baseball Player & Sage



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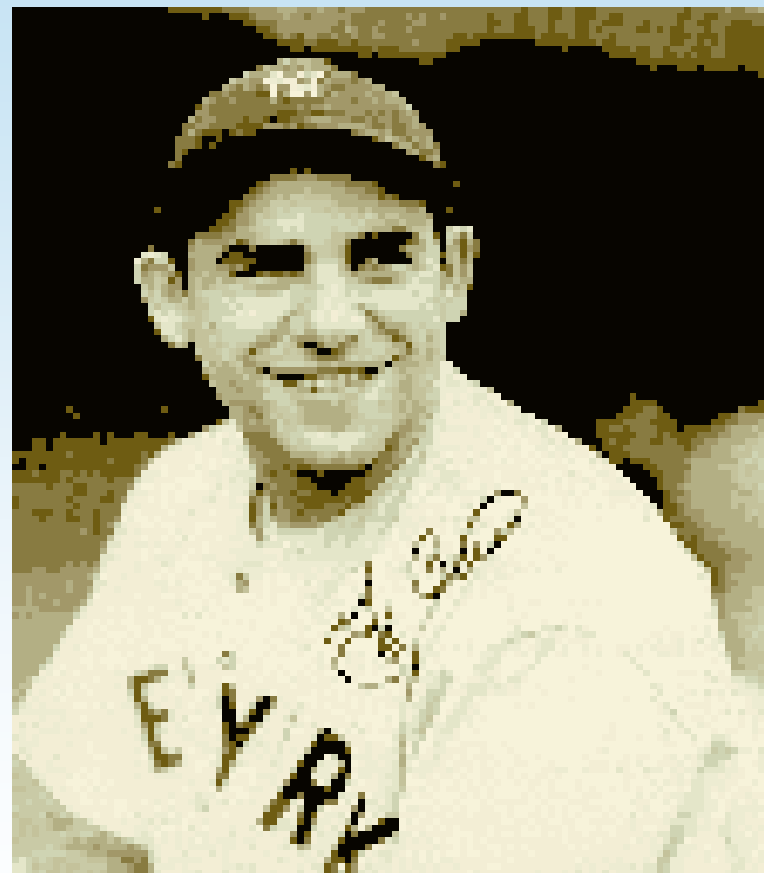


Anticipate the expected, but be prepared to be surprised

Example –

Many organisations responding to the tsunami had not planned for tetanus

—
They did not have anti-toxin as part of their supplies



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Conclusions

- Good objective intelligence & needs assessment are key
- Infections are potentially a major threat
- Good surveillance and early response saves lives and political commitment and backing are essential
- Evidence based interventions and use of previous experience are vital
- Psychological sequelae are inevitable, including among the responders but can be reduced
- Build on what you have already (rather than creating new structures)
- Learn from experience and practice beforehand when you can
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