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# Teaching humanitarian surgery: filling the gap between NGO needs and subspecialized surgery through a novel inter-university certificate

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## Abstract

**Background:** Access to surgical care is a global health burden. A broad spectrum of surgical competences is required in the humanitarian context whereas current occidental surgical training is oriented towards subspecialties. We proposed to design a course addressing the specificities of surgery in the humanitarian setting and austere environment.

**Method:** The novelty of the course lies in the implication of academic medical doctors alongside surgeons working for humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGO). The medical component of the National Defense participated regarding particular topics of war surgery. The course is aimed at trained surgeons and senior residents interested in participating in humanitarian missions.

**Results:** The program includes theoretical teaching on surgical knowledge and skills applied to the austere context. The course also covers non-medical aspects of humanitarian action such as international humanitarian law, logistics, disaster management and psychological support. It comprises a large-scale mass casualty exercise and a practical skills lab on surgical techniques, ultrasonography and resuscitation. Attendance to the four teaching modules, ATLS certification and succeeding final examinations provide an interuniversity certificate. Thirty participants originating from 11 different countries joined the course. Various surgical backgrounds, training levels as well as humanitarian experience were represented. Feedback from the participants was solicited after each teaching module and remarks were applied to the following session. Overall participant evaluations of the first-course session are presented.

**Conclusion:** Teaching humanitarian surgery joining academic and field actors seem to allow filling the gap between high-income country surgical practice and the needs of the humanitarian context.

**Keywords:** Surgery; austere; teaching.

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