

NO-FEAR! First Responders at the Frontline: Collaborating with the Non-Professionals



By Anna Joval

Imagine an ordinary day at work. The coffee is fresh, and you wait for your next assignment. Then it happens. The disaster alarm goes off and it is yours and your teams' responsibility to respond. It could be a natural disaster or a terrorist attack. Hundreds, maybe thousands of people, are affected. Hundreds may need health care; many may already have lost their lives. Civilians are already at the scene facing the calamity.

In these circumstances, one can easily be overwhelmed by the magnitude of the situation, but at the same time the EMS personnel are trained to respond to emergencies, no matter how small or big they are. It is in our backbone to always provide medical care and offer help. The above imaginary scenario is no longer unthinkable, and the reality is that you, as a first responder, one day could be the one on duty when the



Image courtesy of ICRC Syria

alarm goes off on a massive disaster or a critical security incident.

This article will introduce you to the NO-FEAR project¹ (Network Of practitioners For Emergency medical

systems and cRitical care), and describes some of the challenges associated with bystanders and non-organized volunteers, whilst outlining how you can engage with the project activities.

The NO-FEAR Project

EMS plays a vital role in assisting wounded and sick people after security incidents. However, there are several challenges that need to be addressed. As a response to these challenges, the pan-European NO-FEAR project was launched in 2018. This coordination and support action project brings EMS, suppliers, academia, decision makers and policy makers together to collaborate and exchange knowledge, good practices and identify lessons learned.

Many of the NO-FEAR partners are practitioners who were directly involved in the terrorist incidents in Paris, Nice, Berlin, Madrid and Barcelona. Based on their experiences, the consortium



Image courtesy of Yves Magat, Afghanistan

initiated the project to better prepare and respond to several challenges that EMS face, and to overcome difficulties, such as:

- A fragmented chain of actors responding to security related incidents.
- A need for actors to respond to new threats such as terrorism and armed conflicts.
- A lack of communication between the practitioners working in the field and suppliers providing goods and services.
- No common methodologies and standardised actions.

The threat and risk situations today are quite different from just a few years ago, and security and preparedness plans are constantly being adapted to respond to new challenges. Cross-border collaboration to develop a common understanding of the innovation potential gives this project a unique opportunity to improve the capabilities of EMS to respond to new threats, and assist casualties after security incidents. This in turn will fill operational gaps and identify areas for future research, making EMS more resilient.

A higher frequency of natural disasters, critical security incidents and terrorist attacks are a growing trend in Europe and beyond. The correlative rescue work is unpredictable, challenging and involves well known dilemmas and potentially dangerous situations. When disaster strikes, we must be prepared, but what about the people already on site – the bystanders?

Civilians: The First to Save Lives

Bystanders and non-organized volunteers usually initiate life-saving measures quickly. It is a misconception that people become helpless or panic during a crisis. Although one may be affected by fear, the desire to help is stronger. The official report after the shootings at Utøya in Norway, 22nd of July 2011² points out what a valuable resource the ordinary man and woman are when disaster strikes. At Utøya, in addition to logistics on water, civilians also performed first aid, provided warm blankets and clothing,



Mexico City: people helping after the earthquake. Shutterstock.

and showed tremendous care and compassion. In the minutes following a critical incident, there will normally only be the wounded and bystanders on site before the police and EMS arrive. These minutes can be critical for severely injured people and can mean the difference between life and death. Bystanders who understand the urgency of the situation may feel an immense responsibility. Getting an overview of the situation and simultaneously trying to save lives with minimal resources contributes to additional stress³. Reports tell the story of former bystanders who say that leaving someone behind is not an option, even with a “great personal risk and subsequent injury”⁴.

When the shootings at Utøya started, it did not take long before people at the landside understood that something was wrong. They heard gunshots and saw youths jump into the water, swimming for their lives. We have also learned from the reports that young survivors from Utøya tried to help friends escape the gunshots. Residents on the landside and camping guests collaborated to rescue the hypothermic and injured teenagers. Whilst the youths immediately started to help each other, the residents and the camping guests got their boats on the water and went out to rescue the cold and injured teenagers. Some of the volunteers were shot at while saving lives². Nevertheless, they kept transporting injured persons to the

mainland. These volunteer efforts continued for some time after the police and EMS had arrived. At some point, volunteers even provided water transportation for the police. Later they said: “the collaboration with the professionals was good, but it took them a long time to arrive”⁵.

The concern is not about people’s willingness to contribute when disaster strikes, but whether there should be limitations to what actions one can expect from bystanders. Although it is sometimes necessary for first responders to make use of bystanders and non-organized volunteers to effectively meet the needs of the injured, the ethical reflections around whether professional responders put non-professionals in harm’s way, either physically or emotionally, must be

Biography: Anna Joval



Anna Joval works for the Norwegian Red Cross as an Adviser in the ambulance and crisis management initiative (Health Care in Danger and the NO-FEAR project). Before that she worked for 15 years as a specialized nurse in the emergency medical field, including field experience from Australia, Zambia and Syria. She specialized in Emergency Nursing at Oslo Metropolitan University and completed her Master’s in Safety and Security Management at the University of Stavanger. She also has a Diploma in Human Rights and Multiculturalism from the University of South-Eastern Norway, Drammen.



Image courtesy of Martin Chico, Yemen

taken into consideration and further discussed. Given the unpredictable nature of any crisis, we understand that being near or on the site of the incident involves personal risks, but EMS has a duty to act, balanced by a duty to consider relative risk⁶. At the end of the day, we are the ones who need to prepare for, and gain knowledge

of, how to leverage bystanders and non-organized civilians as medical force multipliers during MCIs (mass casualty incidents)⁴.

The Perception of the Bystanders' Efforts?

Even those who work with adverse events may perceive a crisis as surprising and threatening. At the same time, they are expected to make decisions very quickly and with overwhelming pressure⁷. Hence, it is not difficult to understand if and why professional first responders associate bystanders with increased chaos and stress, rather than as essential resources in the rescue work.

However, research⁸ has previously shown that the inherent altruism of the population is crucial to the efforts made to save lives under acute incidents. This selfless concern for the wellbeing of others may explain why people help each other, carry out life-saving measures and stand together in times of crisis. Empirical evidence suggests that the civilian population can provide valuable resources which have not been fully utilized. One reason may be the argument that when many want to “do well”, chaos and ambiguity can arise, which in turn can be problematic for the professionals⁸. One cannot stop people from arriving

Norwegian Red Cross

The Norwegian Red Cross (NorCross) is a humanitarian organization that is committed to, and bound by, the fundamental principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and acts as the guardian of the Geneva Conventions.

NorCross' mission is to “reveal, prevent and alleviate human suffering and distress”. As an auxiliary to the Norwegian authorities in the humanitarian field, NorCross' activities in Norway aim to assist and supplement relevant public services. NorCross' activities are grounded in local needs, resources and competencies, and carried out by volunteers working in their own communities. For individuals and local communities this means that the Red Cross will be there when accidents and disasters strike, and that it is making an ever-greater contribution to the care of children, young people and senior citizens.

The overall objective of NorCross international work is to reduce the vulnerability of local communities and to prevent loss of life

Website: <https://www.rodekors.no/en/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/rodekorsnorge?lang=en>

to offer help, but too many people with the desire to contribute can also be a burden and an obstacle to the professionals doing their job. This can lead to negative attitudes and wrong assumptions towards the bystanders. Nevertheless, we know that it takes time for professionals to respond to critical incidents and, in the immediate aftermath, the affected must rely on themselves.

Bystanders and non-organized volunteers can and should be considered a resource in crises, from which EMS can benefit. By coordinating efforts and eventually taking over full responsibility, the information and work already carried out can be utilized for:

NO-FEAR

How you can engage in the NO-FEAR project:

The project is funded by the EU and Horizon 2020, which is the biggest EU Research and Innovation programme ever: <http://no-fearproject.eu/>

The NO-FEAR project gives you the chance to engage with stakeholders from the emergency medical field, industry, and academia. This will give you the opportunity to exchange experiences, best practices, and lessons learned together with the ability to access new products and innovation solutions. There are two events per year and several benefits of joining the project. You can be involved in the NO-FEAR project by joining the two networks via our platform: <http://www.no-fearproject-portal.eu/>

- A better understanding of the situation.
- Efficient and correct crisis management.
- A better outcome for both lives saved and psychosocial aspects following the disaster.

This form of crisis management is based on collaboration to achieve control of the situation⁷. However, it is important to keep in mind that each crisis is unique. The affected will have varying degrees of knowledge and needs, thus presenting different reactions to a situation. Raising awareness of the inevitable interaction between the EMS and bystanders is crucial in achieving a better understanding of the value each group has when joining efforts to save lives. National guidelines for establishing easily available first-aid courses to the public could be a way of strengthening the societal

resilience. But first and foremost, it is important that training in managing the bystanders and non-organized are embedded in a standardized education for EMS.

There will always be civilians who are first at the scene of injury and in many cases initiate life-saving measures, sometimes also further safeguarding the disaster area. As a

resource, bystanders are currently not fully exploited, meaning a considerable potential for strengthening society for emergency purposes remains to be utilised.

To contact Anna and find out more about the NO-FEAR project, you can email her at: anna.joval@redcross.no

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