

Responding quickly to a humanitarian crisis



By Leslie Morgan

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Yet again we were all deeply touched at the end of last year by TV footage of another natural disaster – this time the devastating earthquake in Pakistan that measured a huge 7.6 on the Richter scale. More than 73,000 people, including many children, lost their lives, tens of thousands were injured and over three million were left homeless. The reconstruction of Kashmir and its surrounding area will cost an estimated \$5 billion and may take up to a decade to complete.

Already on this page I've written about Durbin's involvement in the aid relief following the earthquake in Iran and the Tsunami in Asia. The lessons we learnt from those two disasters stood us in good stead when it came to responding to this latest crisis. The most important priority that's been confirmed time and time again is the need to act

quickly. One of our customers – a doctor – relied on our fast service to supply him with enough equipment and medicines to set up a field hospital in a small village near the epicentre Muzaffarabad soon after the disaster struck. Within hours of his phone call he had received his order from Durbin and was flying out with everything he needed to see an average of 700 patients a day, mostly with chest infections, pneumonia, wound infections, fractures and surgical emergencies. Those that were too badly injured to be treated in the village were airlifted out by helicopter to hospitals in larger towns.

The second important lesson we've learnt? That it's not just how quickly we supply aid, but how accurately we meet the real needs of the people. For example, enough tents have been sent out to Pakistan from the international relief

teams, but according to the International Organisation for Migration, 90% of them are not suitable for the harsh Himalayan winter.

On the other hand, just last month, I learnt that the Ministry of Health and the World Health Organisation were reporting an increased number of cases of the Congo virus. Durbin PLC acted quickly and donated essential medicines to contain the outbreak, sending out exactly what was needed at precisely the right time.

And although it is heart-warming to report this good news, the tragedy is that a further 300,000 people could now starve to death because many remote mountain areas have been cut off. Landslides have blocked many mountain roads and the atrocious winter weather - torrential rain and snow – is forcing helicopters to stay on the ground. Substantial aid has arrived in the country but, reports the World Food Programme, 55,000 people have received no aid at all. Many areas are without electricity, water and telephone services. Several hospitals have been destroyed. The real work of the aid workers is just beginning and the long-term consequences for those caught up in the disaster are only now becoming clear. The prayers of everyone at Durbin PLC are with them all...

Durbin PLC is a British company based in South Harrow, London. Established in 1963, the company specialises in supplying quality assured pharmaceuticals, medical equipment and consumable supplies to healthcare professionals and aid agencies in over 140 countries. As well as reacting rapidly to emergency situations, Durbin PLC responds to healthcare supply needs from local project level to national scale programmes. Web address: www.durbin.co.uk Email: L.morgan@durbin.co.uk