

Putting the large scale disaster plan into action



By Leslie Morgan

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I've written about Durbin's involvement in aid relief before. It has always been clear to us that there's a need to act quickly and supply exactly what is needed on the ground. It sounds obvious, but even a day's delay can make a huge difference and sending the wrong supplies wastes precious resources as unneeded products fill up warehouses. This is unacceptable as such products later need to be destroyed, which is costly and time-consuming.

As I write, the Israel-Lebanon crisis enters its third week. Like me, you've probably seen the images on TV of Jan Egeland, the UN's emergency relief co-ordinator, making his way

through ruins in the southern districts of Beirut. Thousands of civilians have been caught up in the situation. The UN is pushing for secure routes out of the danger zone so that Lebanese people can make their way to safety. The UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has called for a ceasefire and stressed the need to allow aid into the region. So far, the UN has launched a worldwide appeal for US\$150m and money is pouring in. The US alone has pledged a \$30m aid package.

Durbin PLC comes into its own during humanitarian crises like these. We believe it is our social responsibility and one of our main '*raison d'être*' of the company to be able to help in emergency situations. We employ more people than we need, stock more boxes and pallets than we use for normal business and house extra product stocks so that we can rise to the challenge when urgent extra requests are made.

As soon as we knew of the Israel-Lebanon crisis we put our 'large scale disaster plan' into action. From the very outset, aid agencies contacted us to order painkillers, antibiotics, asthma and heart medication, tranquilizers and various other medicines. Thanks to our vast stocks, our 80-strong team who speak many languages and our 40 years' of experience, we have already established

good relations with the aid agency staff. They come to us because we supply quality products with long shelf life. We minimise potential product damage because we pack appropriately so that stocks can cope with poor road conditions. We offer multi-lingual packs and user information as we realise that aid agencies often send out doctors who speak French, German, Spanish or Italian, for example. This means the products will be administered accurately and safely.

We're using Damascus Airport because it is still open for humanitarian aid agencies. In preparation for use in situations like this one, we have access to many chartered aircraft, including the AN-124 that can take up to 120 tonnes of goods.

In the same way as we have done several times in the past, after the earthquake in Pakistan and after the tsunami in Asia for instance, Durbin PLC plans to donate medicines and medical supplies through WHO recommended initiatives. Not only will the company as a whole offer this assistance, but staff members are also staying behind late to process orders and ensure the aid agencies' needs are met. It's thanks to individuals that a real difference can be made and I acknowledge and thank my team for their commitment once again.

Peace to 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