

PRESS RELEASE

Bridging the medical proficiencies divide

07 February, 2011: Europ Assistance International Health Solutions (IHS) and Action Training Academy's International Training Division (ITD) have created a unique partnership that specialises in emergency medicine training courses for medical professionals operating in remote and isolated environments.

The partnership is assisting medical professionals to further develop their proficiency in the management of trauma and cardiac emergencies by means of a customised theoretical and practical training programme, which is carried out either on site or in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Geophysical services company, WesternGeco, is the latest company to make use of the training programme for a number of its doctors and nurses.

WesternGeco Medical Advisor Dr. **Gerald Cauchi** says that the organisation currently employs over 100 medical professionals; of whom the majority are based on fourteen isolated sites in countries such as: Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Yemen, Jordan, Egypt and Libya. The WesternGeco sites in these countries are typically occupied by between 300 and 1 000 staff at any one time.

"If it were not for the fully-equipped clinics that WesternGeco has set up on its sites, the nearest medical facility could be located anything up to six-hours away by car," says Dr. Cauchi.

Dr. Cauchi cites a medical emergency that took place on a drilling site in Libya fifteen years ago: "I was the main medic on the site and had to evacuate a patient to the nearest medical facility. Unfortunately we encountered a sand storm that lasted three days, which meant that the helicopter could not reach our site. I had to keep my patient in a stable condition for three days in the site clinic before the helicopter could reach us."

The main purpose of having the doctors and nurses on the field is to manage emergencies such as cardiac arrest and road traffic accidents, and to provide pre-hospital care. These clinics are not set up to be hospitals - they are intended to stabilise an emergency and then transport the patient in the best condition possible to the nearest medical facility.

Dr. Cauchi points out that the number of emergencies in the field is relatively low, and as a result, the doctors and nurses do not have the opportunity to practice their skills and thus maintain a good level of competency when dealing with an emergency. Subsequently, three years ago, WesternGeco took the decision to send its medical professionals on emergency medical training in order to upgrade their competencies.

"I identified South African-based Europ Assistance International Health Solutions and Action Training Academy ITD as WesternGeco's training provider of choice. My decision was based on the fact that, in my experience, South African paramedics are the best medics in the world," says Dr. Cauchi.

Improving proficiencies

Action Training Academy ITD Director, **Trevor Justus**, points out that in the ongoing training of WesternGeco's doctors and nurses, there needs to be a strong focus on trauma and cardiac arrest. As a result, the customised twenty-eight day long emergency medical training course covers the following:

- Basic Life Support for Healthcare Providers Course (Accreditation - American Heart Association/Resuscitation Council of SA)
- International Trauma Life Support Course (Accreditation - ITLS™ SA Chapter and ITLS™ International that is endorsed by American College of Emergency Physicians and National Association of EMS Physicians)
- Advanced Cardiac Life Support Course (Accreditation - American Heart Association/Resuscitation Council of SA)

Europ Assistance International Health Solutions CEO **Brett Muir** says that the three short courses that form the basis of the theoretical training programme are highly-regarded internationally-accredited courses supported by associations in the United States of America and the Republic of South Africa. Dr. Cauchi says that these internationally-recognised accreditations are of utmost importance, as they have doctors that move from one site to the next, all around the world.

“Another course that we have included is basic & advanced first-aid instructor training. This training allows the doctors and nurses to re-teach the first aid course to fellow workers on the field,” says Justus. “This is very important for Western Geco, as our company regulations stipulate that a ‘first-aider’ should be within four minutes of any location at any given moment. The field is huge; which has proven to be a big challenge. The first-aid instructor training aims to remedy this,” notes Dr. Cauchi.

Experiential training

Hands-on practical training and experience was another element that WesternGeco requested be incorporated into the course. To reinforce the theoretical aspects of the programme, medics are placed on carefully-structured practical experiential training rotations.

The first key area is placing doctors and nurses in the Level 1 Trauma Unit (ER) of the Johannesburg General Hospital. “This particular unit is one of the busiest in the world, possessing a reputation for being a sought after training ground for foreign registrars and consultants,” says Justus. The medics placed in the level 1 trauma unit are guaranteed to be exposed to an extensive variety of trauma-related conditions.

The next key area is placing the medics in the Trauma Intensive Care Unit of the Johannesburg General Hospital, whereby they are exposed to the continued management of the severely injured post-surgery patients.

The medics are then placed with Advanced Life Support Emergency Care Practitioners – also known as paramedics – that are contracted to ER24 Emergency Medical Support. The medics are stationed in ambulances and essentially gain experience from some of the best paramedics in the world. Medics receive exposure to the initial management of medical, surgical, cardiac, pediatric and obstetric emergencies.

“In other parts of the world, paramedics operate under a license, under a doctor’s instruction; in South Africa, paramedics operate as independent practitioners on an independent license. As a result, South African paramedics make decisions ‘on the spot’,” Justus points out.

“When WesternGeco’s medics are working with the paramedics they learn a great deal from this kind of decision making – which is exactly what happens with WesternGeco’s medics on the field, they have to make decisions ‘on the spot’,” says Dr. Cauchi.

Justus notes that Dr. Cauchi specifically requested that his medics have the opportunity to work night-shifts. Feedback from the Dr. Cauchi’s medics indicated that if they were on duty at night and during the weekend, they were bound to get more experience as they were exposed to a different kind of trauma, such as gunshot wounds and alcohol-related incidents.

Justus notes that the course is very intensive, and that out of a period of twenty-eight days in the country, the medics only have three days off.

“The medics are required to attend the course every two years. I ideally would like the WesternGeco medics to attend the course every year; however, due to a rotation work schedule this is unfortunately not possible,” says Dr Cauchi.

Overcoming challenges

Muir notes that the biggest challenge with bringing the medics into South Africa for the course is getting their registration papers in order.

“It is a criminal offence for foreign nationals to work in South African hospitals without being registered first,” says Muir. Registering a doctor or nurse is a lengthy and intensive process. Each medic that takes the course needs to be registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) or the South African Nursing Council (SANC), which allows them to interact, treat and manage patients.

Clearance is then required for each medic by the Johannesburg General Hospital, Wits Medical School, the Department of National Health, the Foreign Workforce National Programme and the HPCSA. The partnership between Europ Assistance IHS and Action Training Academy ITD manages all registration requirements, as well as travel, accommodation, meals, medical and malpractice insurance, and any other logistical requirement necessary for the medics during the course.

Meanwhile, Dr. Cauchi emphasizes the importance of the invaluable experience gained by the medics during the theoretical and practical training on the course. “Each doctor and nurse walks away from the course feeling much more confident in the management of an emergency,” concludes Dr Cauchi.

Notes to the Editor

There are numerous photographs specific to this press release. Please visit <http://media.ngage.co.za> and click the [Action Training Academy](#) link. The photographs are listed underneath the heading: ‘*Bridging the medical proficiencies divide*’.

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