

INTENSIVE HEALTH TRAINING PREPARES NZDF MEDICAL PERSONNEL FOR IRAQ TOUR

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Newly designed health training is preparing New Zealand Defence Force medical personnel for their deployment to Iraq by testing their ability to treat battlefield injuries.

Lieutenant Colonel Jason Hutchings from the NZDF's Joint Operational Health Group said the nine-week programme includes a two-week stint at Wellington Hospital's Emergency Department, three weeks of joint training with the Australian Defence Force's (ADF) medical team and a field exercise that requires participants to provide treatment while under hostile fire.

"We've designed the training to be as realistic as possible and to international standards to ensure our people are well-prepared to work in Iraq," LTCOL Hutchings said.

An NZDF doctor deployed previously to support the ANZAC training force based in Iraq's Camp Taji said the medical training tests and assesses both individual and collective skills to provide resuscitation and emergency care to what might be life-threatening injuries.

One training scenario required members of the medical team to provide medical care to multiple casualties while under fire. Paint-filled pellets were used to simulate bullets.



Medical personnel bound for Iraq train using different scenarios

"All the participants were able to provide advanced trauma care without becoming casualties themselves to the simulated munitions being fired at them," said the NZDF doctor, who cannot be named due to a protected identity policy for troops serving or who have served in Iraq.

"All our medical personnel have the required foundation skills. Through this training, we challenge them to put those skills into practice using simulated scenarios. What we are testing is their ability to provide life-saving care in the front-line as well as their ability to work together."

He said the insights of contingents deployed previously to Iraq and the decade of experience in Afghanistan helped tailor the training package.

The NZDF members were also rostered on 10 shifts over a two-week period at Wellington Hospital's Emergency Department, exposing them to different workloads and patients. They also attended lectures on resuscitation, trauma care and dealing with clinically complicated cases, and undertook a one-week simulation that tested their clinical skills as well as their ability to work together as

a cohesive team.

"A medical team's communication and non-technical skills are equally important as their clinical skills. By using a mix of mannequin and live patient simulations, we enabled participants to learn some new tools and skills for working together more effectively. This is crucial as the teams will be working in a high-pressure environment," said Dr Paul Quigley, Emergency Medicine Specialist at Wellington Hospital.

"Working at the Emergency Department also gave them the chance to work with real patients and to explore the team's ability to cope with change and environmental stress before they deploy."

Task Group Taji, which comprises 106 New Zealand soldiers and around 300 ADF personnel, began its mission to train Iraqi soldiers in May 2015. Australian and New Zealand military personnel staff a medical facility inside Camp Taji, which has a trauma ward, operating theatre and a two-bed intensive care unit.