

The David Nott Foundation Training Surgeons in Palestine

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Conflict has devastating effects on countries, in particular those with low resources and stretched health systems. It weakens and further stretches medical systems, often rendering them extremely vulnerable. Conflict causes loss of life, the destruction of homes and infrastructure, and displacement of its population, in addition to medical and mental health challenges (1,2,3). In countries where resources are scarce and access to medical equipment and training is limited, doctors are left to face the most challenging of circumstances, ill-equipped and unsupported.

Since the establishment of the David Nott Foundation (DNF) in 2015 by Professor David Nott and Elly Nott, the DNF has consistently worked to empower, train and up skill doctors in conflict zones and natural disaster areas to enable them to save lives and elevate the suffering of war victims (4). The DNF focuses on supporting medical professionals, specifically surgeons and anaesthetists, to make the right choices for their patients in challenged contexts.

Professor Nott has extensive knowledge and expertise in managing war injuries, accumulated from more than 30 years' experience in conflict zones and natural disasters. This wealth of knowledge forms the basis of the DNF's bespoke Hostile Environment Surgical Training (HEST) course. The course is designed to improve the emergency trauma surgery skills of local surgeons and doctors and better equip them for the incredibly challenging circumstances they face on a daily basis. Professor Nott previously set up and led the teaching of the Surgical Training for the Austere Environment (STAE) course at the Royal College of Surgeons.

Alongside the extensive experience of Professor David Nott, the DNF has a faculty of highly-experienced

surgeons that deliver the training programme around the world. Each member of this group of respected surgeons has shown extraordinary dedication to the field of humanitarian medicine through their work in conflict and natural disaster zones. By sharing their expertise with local doctors, they are able to help improve surgical outcomes.

Since its birth, the DNF has trained more than 1,500 doctors and run over 50 missions to regions including Syria, West bank, Gaza, Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Kenya, Cameroon and Ukraine. The DNF prides itself on its one of a kind training materials and surgical models, making the course truly unique in its nature. All surgical cases that feature in the modules are cases the DNF team have operated on in the field during missions.

The teaching models are specifically made for the DNF, making the course world-leading and unrivalled. One example is the use of Heston, a life-sized human replica crafted from silicon. Heston's intricate design ensure that his skin, bones and organs feel and look authentic.

This anatomical accuracy provides surgeons with a realistic look at what they may expect during real field operations and difficult procedures in austere environments.

The DNF is a UK registered charity with long term links with Palestinian doctors. This was initially formed through missions that Professor Nott led (along with the DNF team) to Gaza in 2014 and 2018, in addition to missions to the West bank in 2017 and 2022. We have trained over 100 Palestinian surgeons over this period.

The foundation also prides itself on a scholarship scheme, such that surgeons are sponsored to come to the

UK and attend DNF training courses, including Training of the Trainer, helping to establish a group of Palestinian surgeons who on their return can up skill others.

With the unfolding of the recent war in Gaza, including the vast number of casualties and the collapse of the health system, the foundation has further stepped up its response. According to on-the-ground partners, medical professionals are stretched to their limits and hospitals are overwhelmed. The DNF established an online emergency surgical consultation group with local Palestinian DNF faculty and their colleagues, in addition to senior surgeons from the DNF team offering advice on urgent cases whenever possible.

In addition, we have translated all of our training materials and videos into Arabic and made these available to doctors and surgeons there, to assist them in managing trauma and war injuries.

Furthermore, we are collaborating with other medical organisations, such as PalMed, who have a number of medical and surgical volunteers registered to support the medical aid to Gaza and West Bank when permission is granted. In a collaboration between the DNF and PalMed, during a remarkable four-day HEST course, surgeons and anaesthetists from the UK, Germany, Sweden, Norway and Qatar gathered in Bolton, UK, to learn how to treat trauma injuries in the Gaza Strip. This course not only marked a significant step towards preparing medical professionals for future missions in Palestine, but also reflected a shared commitment to saving lives in conflict zones.

The DNF trained 42 surgeons and anaesthetists, equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed to deal with war injuries. A second training course is being planned for the near future.

In addition, the DNF's senior surgeons are on standby to be deployed to the region to assist in the medical relief and treat injured war victim when permission to enter is granted. There is unfortunate certainty in the enduring occurrence of conflict and natural disaster. With this in mind, the DNF is committed to continuing to train and support doctors in conflict zones such as Palestine for as long as they are needed.

We believe in a world where safe, skilled surgical care is available to all – and that will remain our guiding light.

References

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Figures 1 & 2 Hostile Environment Surgical Training Course Equipments