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Deadly Heat Wave in Karachi, July 2015: Negligence or Mismanagement?

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With more than 1200 deaths reported due to heatstroke in 10 days, the populous metropolis of Karachi, Pakistan, survived one of the worst ever unprecedented deadly heat waves in history in June 2015. Severe temperatures of up to 45 °C, zero wind activity and high humidity all exacerbated by 10–18-hr power outages caused havoc and panic in the city. To make matters worse, this catastrophic weather change coincided with the Islamic holy month of *Ramadan*, during which Muslims are required to fast from dawn to dusk, equating to approximately 15 hours this year. The poor handling and negligent behavior of the local government in the initial few days prompted citizens to handle the emergency situation themselves.¹

While majority private hospitals closed their emergency departments for heat stroke patients, all burden fell on the short-staffed and ill-equipped major public hospitals. Social and media appeals prompted individuals, members of civil society and young doctors to start volunteering day and night in public hospitals. Admitted heatstroke patients, their attendants and all hospital staff were provided ice, oral rehydration therapy, medicines and cold water in huge amounts. Within 24 hours, many wards in the public hospitals saw installation of new fans, fridges and air conditioners, all powered by new

generators donated by philanthropists. Awareness and prevention to heatstroke campaigns were organized by many non-governmental organizations. In addition, the paramilitary rangers force established several medical camps throughout the region to help share the burden.²

While the prime culprit was the extreme weather, the country has witnessed a display of finger-pointing in which the local electric supply company, national power regulating authorities, and the disaster management authorities were implicated for lack of preparedness and failure to provide services which would have prevented many deaths.³ In the end, it was the citizens that helped avert many deaths and further casualties as they owned the city during the last few days of the deadly heat wave.

Conflicts of Interest: None declared.

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