Royal Thai Army nurses visit USNH Yokosuka counterparts

Story and photo by Joe Schmitt, CFAY Public Affairs

Nurses from the Royal Thai Army Nursing College visited the staff and facilities at U.S. Naval Hospital (USNH) Yokosuka March 8, as part of their nursing course and to help build the relationship between the two countries.

The Director of the Royal Thai Army Nursing College, Maj. Gen. Somjai Supyapoung visited the hospital as the head of the group and had a conversation with USNH Yokosuka Commanding Officer Capt. Stephen Pachuta. Afterwards, she took a tour of the hospital with the other nurses.

The tour did not consist of just members of the Royal Thai Army. Members from the navy, air force and civilians; all enrolled in the nursing course, got to see how the hospital officers and corpsman operate. There were about 80 nurses in total who were part of the group.

The tour highlighted sections of the hospital that showed how and where USNH Yokosuka nurses worked, such as the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Lt. Ken Barber, intensive care nurse, explained what the ICU can do for patients. The Thai nurses asked questions about how the ICU differs from the rest of the hospital. Barber said that ICU patients can be more closely monitored and can receive different types of care and medication.

The Thai nurses were interested in learning what was new to them at the hospital and saw similarities with how U.S. Navy nurses worked within the ICU.

"The importance of nurses in our hospital is [that] they are a liaison between doctors, the orders and patients' care 24 hours a day," said Cmdr. Bussara Burana, Royal Thai Navy nurse. "We are in charge of patient care and monitor them all the time."

Burana said she heard the hospital had excellent teamwork, so they wanted to come see how they did nursing management.

The tour was guided by officers and enlisted from the hospital. ICU Division Officer Lt. Brian Guzman was one of the guides that showed the different areas of the hospital to the visiting Thai nurses.

"I think it's great to share knowledge amongst each other," said Guzman. "It's a great opportunity. We might have things to show each other that the other may not know of, or practices that we could both learn from."

The second part of the visit was a command brief. The nurses were introduced to the hospital's mission and facts about how they support the U.S. Navy's individual augmentee in support of missions in Afghanistan and Iraq. The nurses were also interested in the number of patients, child births, operations and medical testing the hospital was capable of handling.

USNH Yokosuka Intensive Care nurse Lt. Ken Barber, explains how the hospital uses equipment like a medical mannequin and monitoring equipment to visiting Royal Thai Army Nursing College nurses March 8. The nurses toured the operating rooms, intensive care unit, emergency rooms and laboratory during their visit and spoke to hospital staff as part of a subject matter expert exchange.

A gift exchange between Pachuta and Supyapoung after the tour and brief concluded the visit. The visiting nurses gathered for a group photo with USNH Yokosuka staff before boarding their bus to depart.

Red Cross website links Japan-based service members to home

By Elaine Wilson,
American Forces Press Service

In the wake of Japan's massive earthquake and tsunami March 11, Red Cross officials are encouraging U.S. service members and families stationed there to register with an online resource intended to keep family and friends back home informed of their welfare.

Military members and their families overseas can relay their status and pass on messages to loved ones through the American Red Cross-sponsored "Safe and Well" website at http://redcross.org.

"It's a great online tool," said Deanna Swanier, senior director of service delivery for the American Red Cross' Service to the Armed Forces. "Family members back here can visit the website and look up loved ones to see if they're safe."

Hours after the earthquake and tsunami struck, officials confirmed U.S. military personnel and their families were accounted for. Still, family and friends back home were seeking information.

One woman turned to the Misawa Air Base Facebook page for information that day. Misawa is about 400 miles north of Tokyo.

"Not sure if anyone can find out anything," she wrote, "but my brother is on base, and we're trying to figure out if everything is OK over there. Does anyone know?"

To register for Safe and Well, people enter their name, contact information, and then choose from a list of standard messages: "I am safe and well, Family and I are safe and well," or "Currently at shelter." Or, they can type a customized message.

While many service members may turn to e-mail or, if available, a phone call to contact immediate family members after a disaster, Swanier encouraged them to also register on Safe and Well so extended family members and friends can find out about their well-being.

"It offers another avenue of communication," she added.

Red Cross officials said family and friends back home can access the messages by entering the service member's pre-disaster phone number or complete home address. They cannot, however, register themselves on the site. The site is intended to facilitate communication from inside the disaster-affected areas to families outside.

While the site offers a quick and easy way to pass on a person's current status, not everyone chooses to register. In this case, officials encourage people to try calling, texting or checking online to see if their loved one is updating their social media page, such as Facebook or Twitter. People who have a loved one with a serious health or mental health condition can initiate an Emergency Information Request by calling their local American Red Cross chapter or calling 1-800-RED-CROSS.

Along with Safe and Well, Red Cross officials also passed on a few other ways to contact U.S. citizens living or traveling overseas.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has launched a special "Family Links" website to help people seeking to re-establish contact with family members and friends. People in Japan and other countries in the Pacific can register at http://www.icrc.org/familylinks to inform their family and friends that they are safe, and provide their current contact information.

People in the United States looking for loved ones can check the list for information. They also can register the names of family members and friends, encouraging them to get in touch.

Additionally, people can contact or locate U.S. citizens living or traveling in Japan by calling the State Department's office of overseas citizens' services at 1-888-407-4747 or 202-647-5225.