Bilateral drill puts U.S. Navy, host nation capabilities to test

By Jennifer Savage, USNH Yokosuka Public Affairs

U.S. Naval Hospital (USNH) Yokosuka, Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF) Hospital and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) Medical Service Unit Yokosuka first responders conducted a mass casualty exercise Nov. 18.

The bilateral drill, which takes place annually, is an important part of ensuring medical personnel are prepared to provide the services required in a disaster situation and to test interoperability between U.S. Navy and host nation Japan first responders.

"We participate in drills like this every year. They allow us to practice our own response to a disaster, and they also strengthen our ability to operate closely together with JMSDF first responders and hospital personnel," said Lt. Cmdr. John Ringquist, a USNH Yokosuka emergency physician and chair of the hospital's emergency management working group.

In this exercise, a simulated fuel tank explosion occurred at the Hakozaki Fuel Terminal on Azuma Island. The simulated explosion resulted in 30 simulated casualties in varying degrees of severity.

Many of the capabilities of USNH Yokosuka were tested during the exercise. After receiving the call that there were casualties on Azuma Island, the hospital launched its emergency response team (ERT), a 30-member collection and treatment unit that provides triage, resuscitation, stabilization and casualty evacuation assistance, to the site. Both the ERT and the JSDF emergency responders arrived on-island and immediately began caring for the simulated casualties.

"The bilateral coordination and planning between all the key players directly contributed to a successful exercise," said Lt. Kyle Kee, USNH Yokosuka's emergency management officer. "This demonstrates our ability to work together in the event of a true disaster."

As part of the drill, 12 Japanese and American patients were transported to the JSDF hospital and 18 to USNH Yokosuka for care. There, hospital staff exercised mass casualty procedures, including establishing triage, medical and surgical care and patient tracking processes.

In an emergency situation, patient tracking is an especially important aspect of medical care as it ensures patients receive the specific care they need, said patient administration Leading Chief Petty Officer Letra Simmons.

"It is especially challenging during a mass casualty event because you get an influx of very serious patients all at one time," said Simmons. "The more you practice, the better equipped you are when this happens in real life."

USNH Yokosuka and JMSDF Medical Service Unit first responders attend to a simulated casualty during an annual bilateral disaster drill on Azuma Island. Drilling is an important part of ensuring medical personnel are prepared to provide the services required in a disaster situation and to test interoperability between U.S. Navy and host nation Japan first responders.

Photo by Richard McManus

According to USNH Yokosuka Commanding Officer Capt. Kevin Moore, drilling puts the medical staff's emergency response skills to the test, and also sends an important message to the Japanese community that the hospital is ready and able to respond with JSDF to a disaster scenario.

"By taking part in this drill, we are showing the community that we are committed to supporting the Navy and Japan efforts to bring rapid humanitarian assistance to the public if ever needed," Moore said.

Don't let holiday season blues get you down

By Lt. Cmdr. John M. Woo, USNH Yokosuka

The winter season brings us many great joys – celebrating the holidays, spending time with family and spreading good cheer; however, it is not uncommon for some to experience what has become known as the "holiday blues."

You are surrounded by people having fun, enjoying life and being generally happy, but somehow you feel just the opposite. You may feel sadness, loneliness or just not being part of the group. Then, you start to wonder what's wrong with you.

The good news is, there's nothing wrong with you! That joy and happiness that we all see portrayed in the movies and on television is not always as intense in real life as the entertainment industry would like us to believe, and that can be disappointing. On top of that, the holidays can be stressful with family, shopping, traveling and time pressures. Finally, three major holidays, Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's, are all celebrated within a few short weeks of each other, leaving little time to regroup. If you add this all together, it is a hectic time of year and it is easy to see why some people may not be in the holiday spirit.

Some symptoms that you may be suffering from the holiday blues are sadness, wanting to be alone, melancholy, tiredness, low energy, poor sleep, poor appetite, irritability, headaches, stomach aches and a whole host of other generally "not feeling good" symptoms. It is important to understand is that this is your body and mind reacting to the increased stresses going on during this time. This is a normal reaction.

Some people may get struck by the holiday blues and some may not. It really comes down to how each person deals with stress. One way to deal with stress is in an adaptive and positive manner. These positive adaptations include taking part in hobbies, exercising, vacationing, practicing relaxation exercises, taking down time and spending time and communicating with significant others. The key point here is that these are positive ways of dealing with the stress that don't magnify the negative or cause problems for those around you.

There are many non-positive ways to deal with stress. They entail turning to behaviors that may harm you now or in the long run, or may cause great concern to those around you. Non-positive behaviors for responding to stress include alcohol and drug use, behaving impulsively by spending excessively or having questionable relationships, getting angry and being irritable. While some of these behaviors may feel good at the time, they end up compromising your health and well being.

So if you start to feel down, take a minute and think about how you want to deal with your holiday blues. Whatever positive, adaptive, coping skills you decide to use, take time for yourself to relax and unwind.

If those methods don't work for you, please consider seeking help from a professional. If your sadness or depression lasts more than a few weeks and is accompanied by more intense symptoms of poor sleep, low appetite with weight loss, low energy, lethargy, poor concentration or suicidal thoughts, these may be signs that you are experiencing something more than a touch of the holiday blues and you should contact a mental health professional immediately.

Festival kicks off holiday season

By Mark Elrod, CFAY Public Affairs

Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) came together with the city of Yokosuka to kick off the holiday season with a Christmas tree lighting festival and ceremony at Chuo train station Nov. 29.

Each year, the large, lone pine tree that stands in front of Chuo station is decorated with Christmas lights and lit for the duration of the holiday season.

Some of the pre-lighting festivities included a game of "*jan, ken*," which is a Japanese version of the "rock, paper, scissors" game, involving a large group of children.

After the tree lighting, there were two separate song and dance performances by children, followed by an American-style country and western line dancing performance by the Yokosuka Sparkling Spurs, a local Japanese dance group that regularly takes part in events on board Yokosuka Base.

Additionally, kiosks were available throughout the festival and ceremony with vendors selling souveniors.

In attendance were Mayor of Yokosuka city Yuto Yoshida, Keizo Kosano, son of Minakichi Kosano, for whom CFAY Kosano Park is named, and CFAY Commanding Officer Capt. Daniel Weed.

Weed, who was a guest speaker, was very pleased to be able to take part in the ceremony.

"I would like to thank Mr. Kosano and all the store owners of Yokosuka Chuo shopping street, for inviting me to this illumination lighting ceremony today," Weed said during his speech. "Also, I am very honored to be joining Mayor Yoshida, distinguished guests, and all the citizens on this very wonderful occasion."

After the ceremony, Weed expressed his feelings about how the tree impacts the city.

"The tree helps bring the holiday spirit to the city of Yokosuka," said Weed. "It is a visual reminder of everything the holiday season stands for, which is practicing goodwill toward all."