

## FATALITY MANAGEMENT IN MASS CASUALTY INCIDENTS

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### Summary

Medical involvement in mass casualty incidents requires proper planning and preparedness. In disaster situations, legal aspects concerning the dead add to the general problem of a lack of time, place and resources to maintain routine working conditions, and demand authority and competence. The aspects of planning the recovery of the dead, transportation and morgue facilities, establishment of cause of death, identification, and the final disposition of the dead are discussed. The implementation of forensic mass fatality teams is felt to be the right answer for a better planning and coordination.

*Key words:* Disaster medicine; Fatality management; Forensic medicine

### Introduction

Mass casualty incident management fits into the general framework of acute disaster management, and has to deal with a sudden rise in the needs for an effective medical, social, and psychological intervention, exceeding the normal capacities of the local facilities [1,2]. The Military have been aware of this problem for a long time and managed, with reasonable success, to cope with it in the training of their medical and paramedical troops, as well as in strategic and tactical planning [3–6]. Civil medicine acknowledged the problem of mass casualty incidents later, when it was confronted with the implicit risks of modern warfare, mass traffic, growing industry and technology. It soon became clear that improvisation was not the right answer, and that planning, preparedness and training were essential [7–9]. In this context the dead are often overlooked, possibly because of the predominant influence of clinicians in medical disaster management planning. Although mass casualty incidents often go together with high fatality, it is often forgotten how great an impact the dead have on the survivors, the rescue teams, the media, and the community as a whole [10–12]. In addition, mass casualty incidents will, as in all cases of unnatural death, inevitably give rise to legal investigations concerning the identity of the deceased, their cause of