

Emergency response to terrorism

Motto: „Have a secure and pleasant journey home !“
Janet Beard*

Bogdan Oprea†

„Have a secure and pleasant journey !“ Those were the words Mrs. Janet Beard used in the end of her speech at the final evaluation session of the International Visitor Program, in August 2004. Hearing this, I was shocked. I thought about it day and night, trying to find an explanation. This way of saying good bye is something new for the American society.

The participation at the International Visitor Program in July and August 2004 offered me the opportunity to see how the Emergency Response System works after 9/11 and how the American society changed. The most important change concerns the people security. The whole society is getting ready to act in case of a terrorist attack. But can they cover all the possible situations or scenarios? It is a serious question.

I started thinking about my country. Does Romania's new statute as a NATO member open the gate for terrorist attacks? Can my people become a target, like the Americans? Are we prepared for these sort of situations?

I can answer only from an emergency physician point of view. But what about the other structures involved in the Emergency Response? Are they prepared to act in case of a terrorist attack? I have serious doubts.

The main problem is that our politicians underestimate the danger, since. The second is that people think that something like this can not happen to us.

What happened after 9/11 is typical for the American society. In less than 3 years, people security became a part of the everyday life. But it also became a business: greater number of trained people, more specific anti-terrorist devices etc.

I intend to present how terrorism changed the emergency response and the American society from my experience as a „visitor“.

As I was writing this editorial, I watched a strange event. Somewhere, the guard was paying its respect to a person who was a president during the terrorist attacks in the '60s. During the service, a liberty song was played. Thousands of men and women died fighting for freedom and for the human rights singing this song. This image completely changed my vision on terrorism. If we forget the past and we honour a man responsible for terrorist attacks, why do we take all these anti-terrorist measures in the present? After 10 or 20 years, the politicians forgot that man was a terrorist and offended the memory of those who died for freedom.

That made me think about continuing this editorial in the next editions, since terrorism is a very complex phenomenon.

* Chief of Multi-regional Programs Division Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs U.S. Department of State.

† Attending in Emergency Medicine, Head of the Emergency Department, Emergency Clinical Hospital Bucharest, București, Calea Floreasca No. 8, Sector 1 e-mail: boprita@yahoo.com