

Sophisticated supply chain



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Nowadays supply chain management is a sophisticated discipline and is seen as an important component of any successful business. It helps maintain a healthy cash flow and thereby in turn aids overall profitability. The days when companies would hold vast amounts of product in stock, tying up capital that is ‘not doing anything’, are for the most part a thing of the past. Indeed most companies now work to the ‘just in time’ model that ensures that stock is only ordered to meet specific orders. But it doesn’t just stop there. Forecasting models make use of historical data to help predict seasonal demand along with factors such as weather patterns and public holidays; bar codes are used to

monitor stock usage and trigger automatic re-ordering of keys lines, and it’s even possible to create ‘virtual warehouses’ to ensure that stock for separate divisions is maintained and managed efficiently.

At Durbin, we’ve always prided ourselves on running a modern company, and efficient supply chain management – getting customers what they want, when they want it – has also long been part of the fabric of what we do. Interestingly however, there is one part our business where some of the key principles of current supply chain practice have to, in some part at least, be put aside: namely, when it comes to supplying essential medicines and equipment in an emergency situation.

As I’ve mentioned in earlier articles, we’re proud of the fact that we have a long tradition in supplying the ‘not for profit’ sector and in being able to supply first-response items in the event of a natural disaster. In the case of the latter, experience has taught us that it is vital to hold sufficient quantities of the ‘right’ pharmaceuticals and key equipment in stock so that these can be distributed immediately when the need arises. There really isn’t a moment to lose when it comes to saving lives in situations such as these. The recent tragic earthquakes in both Haiti and Chile illustrate this point only too well.

The very nature of earthquakes is that they cause destruction to buildings and infrastructure and the displacement of people. The requirement therefore to be able to set up emergency medical aid ‘on the ground’ becomes ever more important. In recent years, an increasing amount of innovative mobile equipment has been developed to meet the needs of makeshift and

field hospitals. Here at Durbin for example, we supply both mobile operating facilities (see *Middle East Health* March/April 2008 where I wrote in detail about the CompactOr – a fully functional mobile operating facility), and mobile operating lights. It has been the latter which has been in particularly high demand during the Haiti crisis. Delivering a high intensity beam of light, they are also portable and easy to transport, and they do not need any separate fixtures to attach to – they can stand-alone. All of which makes them particularly suitable for emergency surgical operations. No surprise then that they have been selected as a standard item for use in field hospitals by several relief agencies.

As I write, nearly 115,000 people have died in Haiti and over 195,000 have been injured, with more than 3.5million people left homeless. The conditions have proved difficult for the relief agencies to reach those in need of food, water and medical aid. I’ve said in articles before, that when a natural disaster occurs, it’s about supplying the right item to the right place as soon as humanely possible, and companies like Durbin have a responsibility to listen carefully to the relief agencies and be ready to fulfil their requirements. Thus far, other than equipment, my company has supplied a number of first-response drugs for Haiti including antibiotics, anaesthetics, analgesics and disinfectants. It is because we hold stock of these first-response items that we can supply them at a moments notice. The great experience our pharmacists have in working with government agencies also enabled us to gain permission to supply one of our customers with a Controlled Drug on the same day as it was requested. A doctor working for this major aid organisation was able to take it on the plane with her to Haiti allowing surgery to commence as soon as she arrived.

I’ve become used to the fact that my team pulls out the stops when it comes to a medical emergency. Having the right stock on hand to supply however really does mean – to quote Durbin’s ethos – that they can ‘save lives by saving time’. **MEH**

Durbin PLC is a British company based in South Harrow, London. Established in 1963, the company specialises in supplying quality assured pharmaceuticals, medical equipment and consumable supplies to healthcare professionals and aid agencies in over 180 countries. As well as reacting rapidly to emergency situations, Durbin PLC responds to healthcare supply needs from local project level to national scale programmes.
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