

Militia Pharmacy Officers Roles in the Swiss Armed Forces during the COVID-19 Pandemic

N. Widmer^{1,2}, C. Abbet³, J. Brunner³, J. Faro Barros³, S. Ullmann³, C. Beeler³, B. Hug³, C. Reichert³, V.A.D. Bättig³, G. Caglioti³, M. Flück^{4,5}, R. Herklotz³

¹Logistics Training Unit, Swiss Armed Forces, Thun, Switzerland; ²Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences of Western Switzerland, University of Geneva, Geneva; ³1st Logistic Brigade, Swiss Armed Forces, Bern; ⁴Swiss Armed Forces Pharmacy, Ittigen b. Bern, Switzerland; ⁵Staff of the Surgeon General, Ittigen b. Bern, Switzerland

Introduction

From March 6 to June 30, 2020, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Swiss government has mobilised several militia formations of the Swiss Armed Forces to assist the cantons with healthcare, logistics and security in the fight against SARS-CoV-2. With 5'000 members of the military, it was the largest mobilisation since the Second World War^[1].

Aim

To assess the roles of the militia pharmacy officers deployed throughout the country to assist the healthcare system.

Method

All missions performed by militia pharmacy officers were systematically collected and evaluated. They were also compared to the official duties of pharmacists in the Swiss Armed Forces.

Results

10 militia pharmacy officers were enlisted in 2 out of the 4 hospital battalions deployed, as well as in the medical logistic battalion and in the staff of the logistic brigade that embedded them all. Their missions were mainly to plan, conduct and control medical logistics, hygiene and drug manufacturing activities^[2].

In the hospital battalions, the pharmacists especially managed the tasks described in Table 1.

In the medical logistic battalion, the support of both military and civilian pharmaceutical production facilities was the most important activity of pharmacists and soldiers (Table 2).

Conclusions

Thanks to their civilian and military background, militia pharmacy officers have been quickly and effectively deployed throughout the country. The role of pharmacists within their respective battalions has emerged as especially crucial in the pandemic context and some of the performed missions were beyond their traditional duties. Their official roles and training has to be further developed accordingly, in conjunction with their functions in armies of other countries.

Table 1. Tasks managed by the pharmacist officers in the hospitals battalions

Military pharmacists in hospital battalions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supply of medical material dedicated to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> mission-related training of soldiers civilian health facilities assistance medical transportation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment and application of hygiene procedures to reduce contamination risk of military personnel (as member of the hygiene commission)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of conscripts own medication at time of personal counselling (in one of the battalion)



Picture 1. Central storage of the medical material in the 2nd Hospital Battalion



Picture 2. Military wearing a coronavirus protection suit



Picture 3. Production of hand disinfectant in the Swiss Armed Forces Pharmacy

Table 2. Main activities managed by the pharmacist officers in the medical logistic battalion with the soldiers and the professional staff

Medical logistic battalion main production
Military facility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 42'000 litres of surface/hand-disinfectants
Civilian pharmaceutical facility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 40'000 pieces of anaesthetic drugs 33'500 litres of surface/hand-disinfectants 310'000 litres of infusion solutions

References

- [1] Droz R. Opération CORONA 20. *Rev Mil Suisse* 2020(4):5-7.
- [2] Widmer N, et al. Swiss Armed Forces deployment during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Militia Pharmacy Officers Roles and Duties. *BMJ Mil Health* Epub ahead of print. doi:10.1136/bmjmilitary-2020-001605

Acknowledgments

This study was funded by the Swiss Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport (Centre of Competence for Military and Disaster Medicine)

Contact information

PD Dr Nicolas Widmer;
info@disaster-pharmacy.ch