

# Mongolian medics get Canada's helping hand

Two of Canada's top emergency specialists are about to step worlds away back in time to the Soviet era.

British Columbia Emergency Health Services clinical director Joe Acker and Vancouver Fire and Rescue Services Chief Darrell Reid are heading for the provinces of Mongolia at the end of August to join a team from Australia's Griffith University to help re-build an EMS and disaster system across the country's 21 provinces.

They will face outdated ambulances - some just Soviet era jeeps - with little or no equipment, coordination or resources. Rescue and firefighting services are almost non-existent.

On the flip side, the team will be greeted by enthusiastic doctors and firefighters willing to learn more about major trauma accidents, treating patients with very limited equipment and implementing mutual aid between hospitals and emergency agencies.

The project – *Roadside to Nationwide: EMS and Disaster Response in Mongolia* – delivered a series of Griffith University EMS workshops in trauma last year led by clinical director, Australian paramedic Duncan McConnell, and disaster management expert Dr Hamish McLean.

More than 100 doctors participated in the program and paramedic McConnell's lessons, such as using a belt as an ad-hoc tourniquet, have already saved lives. His techniques were used on the busy main road to the Russian Federation which has passing traffic of 4600 vehicles a day. In one week alone, a single ambulance with limited equipment attended seven major accidents near one small town where a workshop was held.

Prof Acker and Chief Reid will also bring another life-saving skill from Canada – how to keep critically-injured accident victims from freezing in minus 40deg blizzards. And for Chief Reid, the added pressure of how to keep the limited and unreliable rescue equipment from freezing.

Project leader Dr McLean said: "A major challenge for Mongolian medics is the very harsh winters so we have a focus on training to keep people alive who may be trapped for considerable time in a car wreck. Joe and Darrell deliver that specialised expertise which can be challenging to find in Australia."

Prof Acker said: "Mongolia's severe winters are similar to parts of Canada and both also share remote regions where freezing temperatures and distance works against a rapid response by emergency crews.

"Our experience in these conditions will help provide Mongolia with strategies for cold weather patient management challenges and equipment issues."

Chief Reid said: "This project is a great opportunity to contribute to a country with resource and training challenges but committed professionals. I am impressed with the approach being taken by Griffith University."

The team is taking donated medical equipment with them in August. The project is funded by Griffith University, WHO and the Ministry of Health, Mongolia.