

BAYER CARES FOUNDATION SUPPORTS MEDICAL CARE FOR REFUGEES

Mobile aid for the sick and injured

At the end of 2015, over 63 million people around the world were displaced. Emergency situations like this require committed helpers. Simon Link is one such person. He is a volunteer with the German Red Cross in Berlin-Steglitz. Together with his team, he provides medical care in an emergency accommodation center in Berlin. With the support of the Bayer Foundation, he is also developing a new medical care concept – a mobile medical practice.

War, oppression and misery are forcing millions of people to leave their homelands. The routes out of Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, for example, are dangerous, arduous and leave their mark on the health of the refugees. Some 80,000 refugees arrived in Berlin in 2015, and nearly 55,000 of them remained in the capital as well. Help was needed to look after them. "The health authority asked for our support in October. Around 200 people in need of help were waiting at the railway station," says Simon Link, a voluntary member of the Steglitz-Zehlendorf district association of the German Red Cross (DRK) in Berlin. The army had already set up camp beds in a gymnasium, which then served as emergency accommodation for the asylum seekers.

As the refugees arrived at their accommodation in buses, Link and his colleagues were gearing up for the worst case. "We didn't know if some of them might be unconscious, or what kind of traumatic injuries and broken bones we would have to deal with," he says. Although they didn't find anyone who was severely injured, there were many in need of urgent medical attention. "Colds were doing the rounds and some of the children had painful middle-ear infections," Link recalls. He is in the tenth semester of his medical studies at the Charité hospital in Berlin, and has been working with the DRK for six years. From that day on, he and his colleagues looked after the emergency accommodation in Berlin. The medical team consists of nine volunteer doctors and three others who are not doctors.

For the transition from acute to long-term care, the DRK team first needed the proper equipment. "At the beginning, we were still using index cards and typewriters. We now work with digital medical files, like every general practitioner's office," says Link. The team also quickly came to realize that they were not well prepared for the new situation in terms of their medical supplies. "Initially, we were using materials from disaster control. But instead of



Mobile medical practice: Simon Link and Christian Knitter (left to right) initiated a new medical care concept aimed at improving emergency care.

oxygen flasks and defibrillators what we really needed were ordinary medicines such as decongestant nasal drops," says Link. Along with volunteer aid worker Christian Knitter, he therefore initiated a project to develop a new medical care concept. His idea was for a mobile medical practice. In April 2016, this project received EUR 16,500 from the Bayer Cares Foundation. The aim is to make medical care in other accommodation centers easier in the future.

Link and his colleagues initially developed their own emergency equipment. "The equipment in our new rescue backpack includes infusions, medication and oxygen flasks," he explains. The aid workers have already tested the rescue backpacks at public events. Link and Knitter are meanwhile continuing to work on the mobile sick bay, and planning to use handy

aluminum boxes with removable lids. "The boxes are designed so that you can put them on a table and work out of them directly," Link explains. The contents of each box are different – general medication, bandages or documents. Rollers make the boxes more portable.

More and more asylum seekers in Germany will gradually be moving from emergency accommodation into permanent homes, and although the situation for the DRK team is currently relaxed, they intend to continue pursuing and evaluating their project. "We want to be ready if there is another wave of refugees," says Link. The mobile medical practice is designed in such a way that it can also be used in other places. ■