

The battle for the Gastroenterology Hospital in Baghdad 2003

The first time in history a chemical (FORMALDEHYDE) Used in defence

***Makki H. Fayadh**

Background:

The Iraqi society of gastroenterology and hepatology was established in 1992 after 13 years of struggle with the Iraqi government officials which ended in the high court in favor of the society establishment.

Since it's establishment in 1992, the society members succeeded in convincing the officials in establishing the gastroenterology and hepatology teaching hospital in 1995.

The hospital, hundred beds, was established within the big medical city complex (3000 beds) in Baghdad on the remains of the old jamhoree hospital. The complex extends between two bridges on the river Tigris and composed of 7 buildings in addition to Baghdad medical college & the ministry of health building and across the bridge ,the ministry of defence.

Between 1995– 2003, many developments occurred:

- 1- Establishment of the gastroenterology board study 1996.
- 2- Established the surgical gastroenterology board study 1999.
- 3- Established the Iraqi GIT Journal 2001.

During the days of the war and afterwards , I was the Director of the hospital & also responsible for the post graduate studies ,and President of the gastroenterology & hepatology society and chief editor of the Iraqi gastroenterology journal.

The hospital was equipped with many new video endoscopes, EUS U/S machines,

accessories, and a library collected from donations by the society members.the hospital contain 4 big operating theaters, 4 interventional endoscopy theaters,& 4 endoscopy procedure rooms.

Many computers, data shows,& electronic materials, were collected from donations from colleagues all over the world.

Problem of how to save all these equipments and teaching materials was a very difficult task.

Because the hospital building was beside the ministries of defense and of health, & after the start of war , we evacuated our patients to the neighboring Baghdad teaching hospital and limited our work in interventional endoscopic hemostasis for bleeding G.I.T lesions and used our medical resources for the wounded patients in the complex.

The brave staff & post graduate board students in surgical & medical gastroenterology were available round the clock in spite of the heavy shelling of the ministry of defense & the penetration of the roof by a missile..

The bombing was so heavy, that all window glasses shattered, doors broke away, ceiling penetrated by missiles.

Sand bag fortification made little to prevent damages.

Electricity was interrupted and we worked on the generators, which stopped after many days because of lack of fuel.

* FRCP (Ed) ,Consultant gastroenterologist / hepatologist
President / Iraqi society of gastroenterology & hepatology
Chief Editor / Iraqi gastroenterology journal

During the allied forces entry to the medical city complex and the disappearance of the Iraqi police, the big surprise was the start of looting of government buildings, starting in the close ministry of health and then the medical college and I have seen some looters entering our GIT hospital.

I decided to ask for help from the American troops to protect the hospital buildings & the neighboring ministry.

There were 3 tanks very nearby, the commander refused to help and said plainly that they are fighters and not policemen; this is the duty of police!!! .. Following that, looters started entering the hospital and lifting some of the air conditioners, refrigerators, and some hospital kitchen and ward equipments. I went again to the main commander (stationed in the big conference hall in the medical city complex) and asked for help. This time a detachment of four soldiers fully armed, came with me, I was walking in front of them, their fingers were on the triggers ... we managed to catch all the looters, around 12, and they were put into custody, and then released by the soldiers few hours later.

We managed to bring locks for all the doors, but next day the American soldiers broke inside the hospital destroying all the locks fearing of hidden weapons. At this point, as it was forbidden to hold any weapon by the hospital staff, I decided to defend the hospital by all available means of defence.

I made a meeting with the available staff and decided to use FORMALDEHYDE (formalin) of which I had a good stock ,so we started splashing four containers of formalin in every theater and equipment stores, and that succeeded dramatically in stopping looting , as no body has entered the hospital during the coming weeks.

After two weeks, things settled and security improved, so we restarted immediate reconstruction of window glasses,doors mended, torn curtains replaced, stolen air conditioning replaced.

Medical equipments, books and medical accessories were saved by formalin ..

Thanks for the inventor of formaldehyde...a chemical with dual usage???

After all we have discovered the chemical weapon formalin and used it in defence,but the allied forces did not discover the weapons of mass destruction they were looking for.

Thanks for GOD and for all heroes who defended their scientific teaching institute.

We are looking forward for a better gastroenterology in the new democratic Iraq & hoping that all international & national gastroenterology/ hepatology societies including, OMGE,OMED, ACG,ASGE, ESGE, AASLD, ESLD, stand

with us to upgrade our gastroenterology& hepatology .

Hoping 2006 will bring piece to our country.