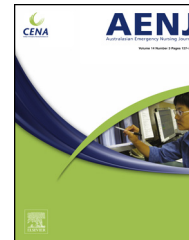




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RESEARCH PAPER

Exploring staff willingness to attend work during a disaster: A study of nurses employed in four Australian emergency departments



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Summary

Background: Much of the literature about emergency nurses willingness to work during disasters has been from a non-Australian perspective. Despite the many recent disasters, little is known of Australian nurse's willingness to participate in disaster response. This paper presents findings from a study that explored nurses willingness to attend work during a disaster and the factors that influenced this decision.

Methods: Data were collected consecutively using a combination of focus group and interview methods. Participants in this study, registered nurses from emergency departments, were recruited through convenience sampling from four hospitals in Australia. Participant narrative was electronically recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed.

Results: The participants for both the focus groups and interviews comprised a mix of ages, genders and years of experience as emergency nurses from across four jurisdictions within Australia. Three major themes that influenced willingness emerged with a number of subthemes. Theme one reflected the uncertainty of the situation such as the type of disaster. The second theme surrounded the preparedness of the workplace, emergency nurse and colleagues, and the third theme considered personal and professional choice based on home and work circumstances and responsibilities.

Conclusions: The decision to attend work or not during a disaster, includes a number of complex personal, work-related and professional factors that can change, depending on the type of disaster, preparedness of the work environment and the emergency nurses' personal responsibilities at that time

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What is known

- The type of disaster will significantly affect the willingness of emergency health care personnel to attend work.
- Emergency nurses are frontline responders and play an essential role in the hospital response to a disaster.
- The willingness of Australian emergency nurses to attend work during disasters has not been extensively researched.

What this paper adds

- Nurses' willingness is affected by complex personal, work-related and professional factors that can change, depending on the type of disaster, preparedness of the work environment and the emergency nurses' personal responsibilities at that time.
- It adds to the global discourse by providing an Australian perspective of emergency nurse willingness to attend work during a disaster

Introduction

The willingness of health care personnel such as emergency medical practitioners, nurses and paramedics, to work during disasters has been extensively researched; however, there is little research that specifically explores the perspective of Australian emergency nurses' willingness to attend work in disasters.¹ This paper presents the qualitative component, the focus group and interviews, of a much bigger mixed methods study. The bigger study comprised

consecutively, of a national survey, followed by focus groups and then individual interviews with emergency nurses from four Australian jurisdictions. The research aimed to understand the complex nature of the willingness of Australian emergency nurses to attend work during a disaster. The constructs of willingness explored in this study emerged from the literature; however, they have not yet been examined and given meaning to within the Australian emergency nurses' perspective.

Background

Disasters challenge the ability of healthcare systems to respond to the needs of the communities they serve. Damage to infrastructure, lack of staff and increased demand for healthcare caused by the disaster may decrease the effective functioning of the healthcare system. For the purpose of this study, the term disaster includes an all hazards approach, from environmental to biochemical hazards. The healthcare demands during a disaster will increase, especially if these are protracted events, for example in the case of pandemic illness.

Emergency nurses are a critical part of the workforce required to respond to disasters, it is important to acknowledge that disasters inherently place emergency nurses at risk of harm, particularly disasters involving biological or chemical agents.

Much of the literature about emergency nurses willingness to work during disasters has been from an international perspective. The majority of studies of Australian health professionals are of emergency medical practitioners and paramedics willingness to work during pandemics, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear events.²⁻⁵ Across all the international and national research reporting on the willingness of a range of healthcare personnel to attend

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