



Preparing for disasters: Education and management strategies explored



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ABSTRACT

During the last half of the 20th century, the focus of nursing changed from home and field to high-tech clinics and hospitals. Nursing in the absence of technology due to man-made or natural disasters almost disappeared from the curriculum of many nursing schools. Numerous disaster events and threats in the early 21st century caused educators and practitioners to increase the emphasis on disaster nursing and those principles that guide the nurse's practice in response to disasters. This article chronicles tools used by nurse educators to integrate disaster nursing into the didactic and clinical experiences of baccalaureate nursing students. We represent two nursing schools about 90 miles apart that collaborated to provide students with practical application of disaster nursing concepts. Part 1: An educational journey toward disaster nursing competencies: A curriculum in action provides an overview of the curricular tools used to insure adequate coverage of disaster nursing concepts across the curriculum. Part 2: Collaborative learning in Community Health Nursing for emergency preparedness relates the steps taken to plan, implement, and evaluate two different collaborative disaster simulation events. In this manuscript we have attempted transparency so that others can learn from our successes and our failures.

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Part I: an educational journey toward disaster nursing competencies: a curriculum in action

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Abstract

In the last decade, natural and man-made disasters around the world have increased in both frequency and severity. Health care providers and nurses in particular have expressed the need and desire for a better understanding of disaster nursing concepts and practice. Nursing schools have been challenged to lead these efforts, to respond to calls for help during disasters and to prepare the

workforce of the future to effectively respond to all types of disasters. In the U.S, the International Nursing Coalition for Mass Casualty Education worked with the American Association of Colleges of Nursing to develop essential competencies for baccalaureate nurses. Subsequently, competencies were developed for graduate advance practice nurses. The International Council of Nurses Partnered with the World Health Organization to formalize similar competencies appropriate for nurses to respond to disasters across the globe. These core guidelines and other discipline specific guidance served as the foundation for building a curriculum with a strong emphasis on disaster nursing.

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Globally, during the last 20 years, 2.6 billion people were affected by 85,000 natural disasters and 2 million people were affected by technological disasters (World Health Organization, 2011). These facts have triggered a resurgence of interest in and demand for disaster nursing education. Global events have increased the need for a broader perspective teaching an all hazards approach in nursing education. The major categories of disasters include natural (earthquake landslides, tsunami), biological (epidemic disease, infestations of pests), technological (chemical substance, radiological agents, transport crashes) and societal (conflict, stampedes, acts of terrorism).

There is not one definition of disaster agreed-upon in the literature. For the purposes of this paper the definition of disaster given by the World Health Organization and the International Council of Nurses will be used. Disaster refers to “widespread destruction of the environment, the economic, social and health care infrastructure, as well as loss of life, overwhelming the ability of individuals and the community to respond using their own resources” (ICN, WHO, 2009, p. 3). The definition of disaster nursing in this paper is, “the systematic and flexible utilization of knowledge and skills specific to disaster related nursing, and the promotion of a wide range of activities to minimize the health hazards and life threatening damage caused by disasters in collaboration with other specialized fields” (Jennings-Sanders et al., 2005, p. 80).

Curriculum development

The increased emphasis on disaster nursing education has spurred the development of both educational and practice guidance related to disaster nursing. As with other skills, application of essential elements of disaster preparedness education should be practiced in a real or simulated situation (Kuntz et al., 2008). Simulation techniques allow student experiences “that would be difficult to replicate in the classroom or in a clinical setting (Carter and Gaskins, 2010, p. 406)”. Disaster simulations require students to quickly think on their feet and transfer acquired skills (Mills et al., 2014). Debriefings following the exercise also allows students to analyze the experience. This paper demonstrates how international disaster guidelines were integrated into disaster nursing curriculum through creative activities.

Educational competencies for registered nurses responding to mass casualty

In August 2003, the International Nursing Coalition for Mass Casualty Education later known as the Nursing Emergency Preparedness Education Coalition, worked with the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) to produce a report titled “Educational Competencies for Registered Nurses Responding to Mass Casualty Incidents (MCI)” (Task Force of the International Nursing Coalition for Mass Casualty Education, August, 2003). The Task Force consisted of representatives from graduate and undergraduate nursing education, professional nursing organizations, and practicing nurses. The work of the coalition has been completed and the competencies and learning modules remain available on the Vanderbilt University School of Nursing website. <http://www.nursing.vanderbilt.edu/incmce/overview.html>.

AACN essentials of baccalaureate and master's education

In the United States, the AACN was in the process of revising the essentials of baccalaureate education for professional nursing practice and master's education to establish congruence with the

Institute of Medicine's (IOM) reports on the future of the public's health and health professions education (IOM, 2003a, b). A number of the revised essentials relate to the nurse's preparedness to participate in disasters response and recovery efforts. For example, consider the Baccalaureate Essentials VII. Clinical Prevention and Population Health (AACN, 2008) suggests sample content in the areas of emergency preparedness and disaster response including self-protection for baccalaureate courses. Likewise, the Master's Essential VIII. Clinical Prevention and Population Health for Improving Health (AACN, 2011) suggests sample content in disaster preparedness and management for master's courses. <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/education-resources/essential-series>.

American Red Cross disaster health and sheltering

Starting in 2012, nursing programs across the U.S. could access a blended learning course, American Red Cross Disaster Health and Sheltering, which explores ways that nursing students can help in a disaster response. The course helps students to become aware of their role in disaster response efforts and provides resources and facilitators for classroom activities including tabletop exercises (American Red Cross, 2012). <http://www.redcross.org/support/volunteer/nurses/students>.

Essential undergraduate curricular elements for disaster preparedness

Definitive guidance for community/public health nursing (CPHN) education is provided by the Association of Community Health Nurse Educators (ACHNE). The ACHNE Disaster Preparedness Task Force, appointed in 2007, published a white paper outlining critical attributes of CPHN faculty and students for disaster preparedness (Kuntz et al., 2008). Teaching disaster nursing content is most often the responsibility of the community/public health faculty. Due to the multi-disciplinary nature of disaster response and the history of public health nursing response to disasters, the community/public health nursing course is a logical place for much of the basic disaster nursing content. However, no nursing specialty area is without need for disaster nursing skills and the competencies included in the white paper can be adapted for use in any nursing specialty course. This framework has been used to evaluate the effectiveness of community health course didactic and clinical activities related to disaster preparedness and response.

ICN framework for disaster nursing competencies

Perhaps the most comprehensive single document related to disaster nursing competence is the International Council of Nurses (ICN) framework (2009). The ICN framework is built on the premise that nursing is the largest group of health care providers and thus all nurses must show competence in a set of basic disaster nursing skills. Furthermore, many of the nursing skills needed in the provision of disaster nursing care are basic to all nurses; however, the nurse is required to use those skills in a chaotic environment that may have minimal resources and large numbers of patients requiring care <http://www.icn.ch/publications/free-publications/>.

The ICN used the well-known disaster management continuum (Prevention/Mitigation, Preparedness, Response, Recovery/Rehabilitation) as the organizing framework for developing nursing competencies. Guided by the four key points on the continuum, 10 competencies were developed (WHO, 2009, p. 49). These competencies acted as a framework to organize disaster education for a University offering a baccalaureate nursing program. Creative

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