

National Disaster Health Consortium



Competency-Based Training and a Report on the American Nurses Credentialing Center Disaster Certification Development

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KEYWORDS

- Disaster education • Competency-based education • Certification
- Interprofessional education • Nursing education

KEY POINTS

- Nurses must be competent in disaster response.
- Education is needed to achieve nurse competencies.
- Interprofessional training facilitates competent practice.
- Certification is a method of validating competency.
- Overcoming barriers is crucial to disaster competency success.

INTRODUCTION

In 2003 the American Nurses Association identified protection of the public as the primary purpose for ensuring the competence of nurses.¹ Competence has been described as professional performance at an expected level. The integration of (1) knowledge, (2) skills, and (3) performance to achieve the expected level of performance is a competency. When individuals display competence they perform at the expected level.² Competent practice is needed for disaster response. Disasters are complex events with inherent risks of mortality and morbidity and thus demand specific knowledge and skills. These events require highly trained personnel.

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Disasters are multifaceted events that may be manmade or natural. Most definitions of disaster recognize the need for a response that exceeds current local capability. By their nature, disasters are complicated and often require intervention from interprofessional teams.³ The response to an emergent event is dependent on the disaster stage and varies depending on the type of incident.⁴ To prepare for these events, the World Health Organization⁵ has identified as one of its priorities, “Emergency preparedness for effective health response and recovery at all levels. Emergency preparedness, including response planning, training, prepositioning of health supplies, development of surge capacity, and exercises for health care professionals and other emergency service personnel, is critical for the effective performance of the health sector in the response.”

Disaster-Specific Competencies

There has been ongoing discussion and development of competencies related to disaster response performance. A multitude of competencies have been identified for health care workers related to disaster preparation, response, and recovery. Some identified competencies include interprofessional; discipline specific, including nursing; specialized professional; and agency specific. Most recently, in response to a call to action to systematically review and improve the discipline of disaster nursing, subject matter experts met to develop the future of disaster nursing, including recommendations for nursing practice, education, policy, and research. From that meeting a recommendation emerged to develop a national set of disaster nursing competencies to be integrated into both American Association of Colleges of Nursing education essentials and the National League for Nursing (NLN) guidelines.⁶

Seminal work related to interprofessional competencies began in 2007 at the direction of the American Medical Association, which brought together experts to develop education competencies for disaster medicine and public health.⁷ Building on this framework, an interprofessional group worked to define interprofessional competencies needed by health care professionals to respond to disasters. The result of their work is a structure that presents a method of organizing the diverse competencies into a hierarchical framework.⁷ Basic competencies for all health care professions is the basis for the framework, which is depicted in a pyramid design. Progressing up the pyramid, increasingly specific role and discipline competencies are defined (**Fig. 1**).

Nursing Competencies

Disaster-specific competencies for nurses were first described in 2002 by Gebbie and Qureshi,⁸ who started the discussion off by identifying core competencies for nurses responding to disasters. Drawing from the public health competencies developed by Gebbie and Qureshi, the team developed the first core competencies for nurses. In 2003, the International Nursing Coalition for Mass Casualty Education (INCME) identified “Educational Competencies for Registered Nurses Responding to Mass Casualty Incidents.”⁹ The INCME has developed competencies for all nurses as well as materials for meeting those competencies.

Specialty competencies

Within the literature, there are numerous examples of disaster competencies for specific practice areas in nursing. Jorgenson and colleagues¹⁰ describe core competencies for perinatal and neonatal nurses. These competencies correspond to the unique needs of these vulnerable populations by describing measurable objectives addressing the learning needs of nurses caring for these clients. Another exemplar

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