

# Teaching Disaster Nursing in the Online Environment

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Nursing has a vital role in disaster management and assistance. Nurses are the largest group of health care professionals available to meet the needs of individuals affected by disasters and public health emergencies [1]. Disasters can be categorized loosely as either natural or man-made. Recent natural disasters include flooding in Myanmar, earthquakes in Peru, and wildfires in California, USA. Some recent man-made disasters include the Manchester, UK bombings and a mass shooting at a Little Rock, AK, USA nightclub. Nurses need to be knowledgeable about caring for victims of disasters, whether natural or man-made.

Nursing schools have utilized various methods to teach disaster nursing, including community and hospital in-house disaster drills, simulations, and role playing. Community disaster drills involve researching availability of appropriate sites, scheduling transporting and setting up equipment, and instructor time commitment for supervising and debriefing. Disaster simulations conducted within the academic setting need time for scheduling of the simulation lab, coordinating time for instructors and personnel, and obtaining equipment specific to the disaster scenarios.

Nursing instructors may encounter many challenges teaching in an online program. Nursing has readily embraced online delivery as a way to educate nurses [2]. An accelerated nursing degree program is one of the fastest ways to complete a nursing degree. These programs may be accelerated nursing degree programs, degree completion programs and online combined with campus-based. Programs may consist of a didactic component followed by a clinical rotation, a hybrid program with simulation lab experience followed by a clinical rotation, or some variation of the above designs. A major challenge exists for faculty to teach disaster nursing in an RN-to-BSN completion program, or an accelerated program where disaster nursing may be a small part of a Community Health course, and time for a simulation exercise is limited or nonexistent.

Triage in disaster nursing has the goal of doing the least amount for as many injured individuals in the shortest amount of time [3]. For nursing instructors, a parallel challenge is teaching nursing students as much as possible about disaster nursing in a very short time and in the most efficient manner. Learning activities designed to meet this goal can be addressed by including core competencies which have been identified for disaster nursing. In a 2016 scoping review, Thobiaty, Plummer and Williams examined twelve studies identifying domains of core competencies for disaster nursing. The most common domains of competencies for disaster nursing were found to include nurses possessing knowledge of how to initiate a disaster plan, utilizing the Incident Command System (ICS), clear communication, decontamination, and ethics [4].

The following learning outcome for disaster nursing and management was part of a Community/Mental Health course: compare and contrast types of disasters, characteristics of disasters, stages of disasters, and disaster response management as it relates to the role and practice of the community health nurse. Students view and listen to a pre-recorded online lecture encompassing aspects of disaster nursing including: disaster preparedness, disaster response, and individual and community recovery. In order to meet this learning objective, students are given a discussion question comprised of a natural disaster scenario with many victims and few medical supplies. There is a 24-hour response requirement in which the students discuss and describe competencies in the following areas:

- Initiating a disaster plan
- Putting in place an Incident Command System (ICS)
- Initiating a communication system
- Implementing an ethical triage system

The core competency of decontamination is not included in this scenario but is covered within the content of the lectures.

Utilizing the core competencies of disaster nursing provides guidance to nursing instructors in designing learning activities that enhance learning in situations where instructional time is limited.

Positive feedback has been received from students and interest in disaster nursing was found to be enhanced when instructors utilized current disasters reported via various media. More research is needed to identify the most effective way to design learning activities for nursing students in the online environment.

## References

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