NATIONAL EMERGENCY NURSES ASSOCIATION

Board Policy	Emergency Planning and Disaster Preparedness
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Issue

Globally, the threat of natural, man-made and infectious disease disasters is increasing. Disasters result in a surge of demands of varying degree on the Canadian health care system. Emergency departments are often the first-receivers for emergency/disaster affected patients, and Canada's emergency nurses are an essential part of any medical systems response to these situations.

Definition

Public Safety Canada defines a disaster as "…a social phenomenon that results when a hazard intersects with a vulnerable community in a way that exceeds or overwhelms the community's ability to cope and may cause serious harm to the safety, health, welfare, property or environment of people; may be triggered by a naturally occurring phenomenon which has its origins within the geophysical or biological environment or by human action or error, whether malicious or unintentional, including technological failures, accidents and terrorist acts." (Ministers Responsible for Emergency Management, 2017)

NENA Position

Advance planning and preparedness will facilitate the delivery of timely, high quality health services to Canadians in the event of a disaster. NENA advocates for the use of Hazard Vulnerability Assessments (HVA), or similar tool, and the development of both facility and health system Emergency Action Plans (EAP) based on data gleaned from the HVA. These EAPs should include principles from Incident Command System (ICS), Canadian Triage and Acuity Scale (CTAS), appropriate disaster triage tool, hazardous materials (HAZ-MAT) and mass casualty response. This approach will standardize planning, management, and communication both inside the facility, and with other stakeholders involved in disaster response.

As first-receivers, an all-hazards approach to ongoing disaster training and skill maintenance is essential for Canada's Emergency Nurses. Training in disaster response should happen at regular intervals, both within the facility and as part of a community/system response. This multidisciplinary collaborative approach to training will better prepare all stakeholders for interdisciplinary/interagency response and help to identify areas for improvement.

Recognizing the role of emergency nurses in disaster and emergency response, the emergency nurse should take steps to familiarize themselves with their department/facility emergency action plan.

Canadian and international professional organizations and government agencies serve as valuable resources for the coordination of health disaster preparedness.

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