

Community Health Management during Natural Disasters

ABSTRACT

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Disasters are occurrences of sudden calamity or misfortune. Disasters often occur all of a sudden and are mostly unplanned, unintended and unexpected. It often causes high incidence of mortalities due to injuries, drowning, electrocution etc. and morbidity due to total or partial loss of basic municipal facilities such as water supply, sewage disposal system, failure of electricity, telecommunications and even road and rail traffic. Most importantly, due to disaster, the potential for transmission of communicable diseases increases manifold. It has been observed that transmission of water and food borne diseases occur within two weeks of the disasters. This is often due to faecal contamination of food and water. Other contributing factors are endemic level of disease, population density, population displacement and disruption of public health programmes.

The potential for transmission of vector borne diseases like malaria also goes up very much. Vector borne diseases generally occur by the third or fourth week of the occurrence of disasters. This is due to disruption of vector control methods, increase in vector breeding sites, and increased vector-human contact etc. However, it is also found that psychiatric and social maladies have been abundantly reported soon after disaster situation is over. Thus, while drawing up a mitigation plan for disaster related health problems, it should be ensured that the community for which the planning is being carried out becomes equal partner right from the inception stage. Failing the involvement of the population at risk, the plan, howsoever

efficient is doomed. The plan should be as composite as possible. All related sectors must be involved, represented and participated. The plan should be necessarily a long-term plan. The present paper, therefore, suggests some guidelines for a long term health management plan in a disaster situation. The paper highlights a composite, multi-sectoral and long term plan for health problems during disasters like flood, cyclone, drought earthquake and tsunami. It also describes various attributes of disaster medicine. The paper also explains the need to train the local population to render correct first aid for life threatening situations during and after a disaster situation. Secondary methods are being used for the discussion of the study.

Prevention of deaths, disabilities and diseases, as consequence of any type of natural disaster is of paramount importance. Timely and correct first-aid and emergency treatments can help to achieve this aim