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Nurses preparedness and perceived competence in managing disasters

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Natural and human-induced disasters and the rise of disease(s) have been increasing in prevalence and severity. On average a disaster takes place somewhere in the world every day (Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization, 2000). It is now more imperative than ever that healthcare leader and executives possess an overt understanding of need for disaster training and mitigation. There is no doubt that nurses comprise the largest segment of the healthcare workforce, but do they feel prepared to mitigate and respond to the detrimental effects and aftermath of disasters? A 58-item disaster readiness questionnaire was used to survey hospital-based nurses from communities in Texas. The data were collected from a sample of 653 nurses. Findings revealed that most nurses are not confident in their abilities to respond to major disaster events. The nurses who were confident were more likely to have had actual prior experience in disasters and/or shelters. Self-regulation of behavior (motivation) was a significant predictor of perceived nurse competence to manage disasters only in regard to the nurse's willingness to assume the risk of involvement in a disaster situation. Since nurses are often involved in planning, mitigation, response, and recovery aspects of disasters, they should actively seek opportunities to participate in actual disaster events, mock drills, and further educational opportunities specific to disaster preparedness. Administrators must support and encourage disaster preparedness education of nurses to promote hospital readiness to provide community care delivery in the event of a disaster situation.

Biography

Sylvia Baack has completed her PhD in Global Health in 2011 with a dissertation focus on "Nurses' perceived readiness for disasters". She currently serves as the Chief of Nursing Education at VA North Texas Health Care System, where she oversees the nursing education of approximately 1800 nursing staff and over 1200 students annually. She has presented both posters and podium presentations at local, state, national and international forums. She has many published papers.

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