
CAPACITY BUILDING OF HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS FOR DISASTER READINESS IN PAKISTAN

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Disasters are devastating happenings that lead to extensive deaths and suffering. During the past few decades, the world has seen a fourfold increase in the occurrence of various disasters. The disasters have profound economic and social impacts on the communities. They threaten the health of local populations concerning the increasing death toll and injuries as well as disrupt the healthcare services in the affected areas owing to loss of healthcare professionals, structural damage to the health facilities, and burden of health services. Disasters can easily overwhelm any healthcare system due to the sudden and large influx of human beings that immediately need healthcare services. Pakistan is included among those countries of the world that are widely affected by natural disasters including floods, Earthquakes, storms, wildfires, landslides, and cyclones. Moreover, man-made disasters also affected various parts of Pakistan such as mass shootings, suicide attacks, and armed conflicts. Both natural and man-made disasters have severely stricken Pakistan during the last two decades directly and indirectly costing Pakistan nearly US\$126.79 billion.¹ Healthcare professionals are considered a major driving force at the back of any healthcare system. Their pivotal role in the management of public health emergencies and disasters gets more important for the effective management of emergencies inside the healthcare systems as well as the field hospitals. Human resource is quite important for the efficient performance of any health system, however, there is a substantial shortage of healthcare professionals in most countries. The shortfall of healthcare workers is estimated at 17.4 million globally. The World Health Organization (WHO) has included Pakistan in the list of 57 countries that are facing a shortage of health workforce.^{1,2}

Disasters pose a severe physical and mental burden on the healthcare team members, therefore, the awareness and training to face the challenges during any type of disaster are of paramount importance as healthcare professionals serve as the frontline in the management of disasters. The healthcare workers should work in connection with the emergency medical teams, national or provincial disaster management authorities, and other public health agencies for the region and community-wise partnership building, education, and training prospects sharing of resources and staff incentivizing the input of clinical partners in awareness activities and effective communication with the public. The engagement of stakeholders, funding, staffing, rural needs, proper education, and training are some of the challenges that need to be addressed. The Strengthening of healthcare and disaster management teams as well as building an integrated system could help improve national strength in disasters. The studies need to be conducted to assess the existing knowledge and attitude toward disaster preparedness among health professionals. The country is grossly lacking formal teaching as well as training programs in emergency and disaster medicine. It is suggested to train key personnel such as medical teachers, public health providers, health administrators, first responders, facility managers, clinical practitioners, and all allied health professionals. Moreover, disaster medicine could be added either to the core curriculum of undergraduate allied and medical schools or in the undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the universities as well as in the continuing medical education (CME) programs.

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