



### D45 The Many Facets of the Forensic Nurse in Mass Disaster Response

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Attendees will learn how forensic nurses offer a diverse background to integrate knowledge and clinical skills in all aspects of care when faced with natural or man made disasters. This presentation demonstrate the diverse applications that forensic nurses offer to multidisciplinary agencies when faced with a mass casualty event

Effective response to disasters is a necessary action of disaster teams in effort to secure and support the nation. Understanding scene safety and security is essential prior to rendering care to the injured. Forensic nurses, as members of disaster teams, are prepared to respond to situations from natural disasters to man-made disasters. Stabilization of injured persons is foremost in the acute phase and when standards of care and nursing practice directly apply to rendering treatment to injured victims.

There are countless types of disasters. Examples include: fires, building collapses, weather emergencies such as ice storms, hurricanes, or drought, pestilence such as West Nile Virus, and mass transportation incidents. Combinations of natural and man-made disasters occur and clinical forensic nurses are prepared to take on their role in an efficient and effective manner.

Administering first aid and emergency treatment is foremost and key at any mass casualty scene. Clinical forensic nurses are valuable assets in the stabilization and evacuation time period because they provide rapid immediate assessment of the injured and advanced life support care. They routinely deliver acute emergency care in trauma, contributing to the triage process and treatment of disaster victims. Some instances may require them to accompany the victim to a medical treatment facility to continue established care and life saving support.

Gathering critical information such as the victim's medical history, an account of what has occurred, and telephone numbers of family members may assist in facilitating care and treatment to each individual. The nurse's ability to accurately assess and meticulously document observations of sustained wounds and to interpret mechanisms of injury acquired by victims proves advantageous in the pathological examination of injuries and in forensic investigations that may lead to civil or criminal litigation. Emergency response to and recognition of the forensic implications of these events is critical and overwhelming. The forensic nurse is a natural liaison to any community challenged with multidisciplinary efforts.

Because forensic nurse's cross-train with multiple agencies in preparation for mass disasters, the role of the forensic nurse is clearly understood as is their mutual understanding of the professional disciplines within the disaster response team. Forensic nurses may have opportunities to work with search and rescue teams, law enforcement agencies, and American Red Cross volunteers. Knowing what community services exist, directing people to the proper resources may assist in family reunification, and finding systems of support.

Provision of mortuary care, facilitated by the medical examiner's office, is another aspect of nursing care that forensic nurses are resourceful in facilitating communication between families and mortuary services. Identification of human remains as well as addressing concerns for care and disposition of bodies are duties of forensic nurse's that serve as death investigators.

Forensic nursing care continues into the aftermath of a disaster as delayed presentations of physical and/or psychological symptoms may develop among survivors. Nurses must consider that not only primary disaster victims but also caregivers and first responders to traumatic events may suffer from long term physical or mental health symptoms. Forensic nurses provide follow up care and referrals for such victims.

Lastly, a focus on prevention of future disastrous events must be considered to promote health and safety during all incidents. A review of outcomes following events and evaluation of what was learned is imperative in future planning and prevention. Forensic nurses understand the health care response to trauma and violence and contribute to expertise in health care. Training and education offered through the Department of Homeland Security, as well as governmental and community agency resources, is suggested.

#### **Forensic Nurse, Mass Casualty Event, Disasters**