

Nursing Care for Vulnerable Populations During Disasters: A Community-Based Approach

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Description

Disasters, whether natural or man-made, disproportionately impact vulnerable populations, including the elderly, children, individuals with disabilities, and those living in poverty. These groups often face heightened risks due to limited mobility, inadequate access to resources, or pre-existing health conditions. Nurses, as integral members of disaster response teams, play a critical role in providing care to these populations. This article explores the challenges faced by vulnerable groups during disasters and highlights the importance of a community-based approach in delivering effective nursing care.

Challenges faced by vulnerable populations during disasters

Disasters create complex scenarios that exacerbate the challenges already faced by vulnerable populations. Understanding these challenges is crucial for nurses to tailor interventions effectively. Vulnerable populations often lack access to adequate healthcare even under normal circumstances. During disasters, disruptions in medical services, transportation barriers, and the destruction of infrastructure further limit their ability to receive necessary care. Individuals with chronic illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, or respiratory diseases require ongoing medical attention, which can be difficult to sustain during emergencies. Interruptions in medication supplies or medical equipment, such as oxygen tanks, can lead to life-threatening complications. Non-English speakers, individuals with hearing or visual impairments, and those with cognitive disabilities may struggle to access critical information during disasters. This lack of communication can hinder evacuation efforts and delay access to emergency services. Poverty significantly limits the ability to prepare for and recover from disasters. Vulnerable populations may lack the financial resources to evacuate, purchase emergency supplies, or rebuild after a disaster. The elderly and individuals with disabilities may experience social isolation, leaving them without a support network during emergencies. This can delay evacuation and reduce access to life-saving assistance. Disasters often lead to significant psychological trauma, particularly among children and individuals with pre-existing mental health

conditions. Fear, anxiety, and depression can exacerbate their vulnerabilities, requiring specialized care and support.

The role of nurses in a community-based approach

A community-based approach is essential for addressing the unique needs of vulnerable populations during disasters. By leveraging local resources, fostering collaboration, and tailoring interventions to specific community dynamics, nurses can provide effective and culturally sensitive care. Nurses play a critical role in assessing the needs of vulnerable populations before disasters strike. Community health assessments can identify at-risk individuals, map their specific needs, and establish care plans that account for potential disruptions. Collaborating with local organizations, faith-based groups, and social services ensures a comprehensive understanding of community vulnerabilities. Preparedness efforts should include conducting disaster preparedness workshops for vulnerable populations to teach basic survival skills, such as first aid and emergency communication. Identifying shelters that are accessible to individuals with disabilities and ensuring they are equipped with necessary medical supplies and assistive devices. Establishing trust with community members, particularly those who may be hesitant to seek help due to cultural or language barriers. During disasters, nurses must adapt quickly to changing circumstances to provide life-saving care. Key responsibilities include ensuring that the most vulnerable individuals receive immediate attention. Nurses must prioritize care based on the severity of conditions, particularly for those with chronic illnesses, disabilities, or acute injuries. Providing care that respects cultural beliefs, practices, and language preferences. Employing interpreters and culturally appropriate materials can improve communication and trust. Implementing psychological first aid to help individuals cope with trauma. Establishing safe spaces for children and providing emotional support to families can alleviate stress and promote resilience. Collaborating with community organizations to distribute essential supplies, such as food, water, and medications, and to facilitate access to shelters and medical care. The recovery phase is crucial for rebuilding community resilience and ensuring long-term health outcomes for vulnerable populations. Nurses can reconnecting individuals with primary care providers and ensuring access to

necessary medications and follow-up services. Helping vulnerable populations rebuild social connections and access support networks, such as senior centers or community groups. Nurses can advocate for policies that address systemic disparities contributing to vulnerability, such as improved access to healthcare, housing, and disaster preparedness resources. Nurses can utilize technology to enhance care delivery during disasters. Mobile health applications, telehealth services, and electronic health records allow for real-time communication, monitoring, and coordination of care for vulnerable populations, even in resource-limited settings. Nursing care for vulnerable populations during disasters is both a challenge and an

opportunity to make a profound impact. By understanding the unique risks faced by these groups and adopting a community-based approach, nurses can deliver effective, equitable, and compassionate care. Preparedness, collaboration, and cultural competence are key to building resilient communities capable of withstanding the devastating effects of disasters. As frontline responders, nurses have the knowledge and skills to advocate for and protect society's most vulnerable members. Their role extends beyond immediate care, encompassing long-term recovery and empowerment. By embracing a holistic approach to disaster nursing, nurses can ensure that no one is left behind in times of crisis.