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MINISTÈRE DE LA SANTÉ NATIONALE
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INTRODUCTION TO DISASTER NURSING

by

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The term disaster is defined as "a sudden or great misfortune, calamity; ill luck". Disaster Nursing may be defined as nursing care adapted to conditions prevailing in disasters (peacetime or wartime) where the number of casualties place an undue strain on our facilities, supplies, equipment and personnel.

Disaster may strike at any time. A disaster causing mass casualties will require nurses to extend their practice; to cope with situations calling for improvised methods; to handle emotional stress (their own as well as others) and to provide the best possible nursing care under what may be less than desirable conditions.

In order to accomplish these tasks, nurses must first accept the responsibility to be prepared to render nursing care in the emergency situations which a disaster creates. If disaster strikes there is a need to know what to do, to provide the type of leadership required, to give the type of care that, as a nurse, she had been educated to give. Once the disaster strikes there is no time to indoctrinate nursing staff that is why nurses need to prepare themselves, know their community and its plan, the hospital plan and recognize their responsibilities as nurses and citizens.

In order to function both effectively and efficiently in disaster situations, their responsibilities should be considered in three phases - first, the pre-disaster phase, secondly, the disaster phase and thirdly, the post-disaster phase.