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Beyond Bedside Care: Reframing Disaster Nursing Education as a Health System Resilience Strategy

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Abstract

The increasing frequency and complexity of disasters are placing unprecedented demands on health systems and the nursing workforce. Despite nurses playing a central role in disaster preparedness and response, disaster-related competencies remain inconsistently integrated into nursing education. This gap should be viewed not merely as an educational issue, but as a matter of health system resilience. Future disaster-ready nurses require competencies extending beyond clinical care, including leadership, systems thinking, ethical decision-making, and interprofessional collaboration. Competency-based education, simulation training, and emerging digital technologies may help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world practice. Reframing disaster nursing education as a health system resilience strategy may strengthen preparedness and ensure that nurses are equipped not only to respond to crises, but also to lead through them.

The increasing frequency and complexity of disasters driven by climate change, emerging infectious diseases, armed conflicts, and humanitarian crises continue to expose vulnerabilities within health systems worldwide.[1] Although nurses constitute the largest segment of the health workforce and remain at the forefront of disaster response, an important paradox persists: expectations regarding their responsibilities have expanded considerably, whereas educational preparation has not evolved at the same pace.[2]

Disaster preparedness should no longer be viewed solely as an educational issue but rather as an essential component of health system resilience. During emergencies, nurses are expected to undertake responsibilities extending far beyond bedside care, including triage, crisis communication, psychosocial support, infection prevention, and coordination with multidisciplinary teams throughout all phases of disaster management.[3] However, disaster-related competencies remain inconsistently integrated into nursing curricula across many settings.[2]

This gap is becoming increasingly concerning because disasters themselves are changing. Climate-related events, emerging pathogens, and complex humanitarian emergencies require nurses to possess not only technical skills but also competencies in leadership, systems thinking, ethical decision-making, and interprofessional collaboration.[3] Preparing nurses exclusively as clinical responders is no longer sufficient.

Competency-based education, simulation exercises, interprofessional disaster drills, and digital learning technologies may help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world practice. Recent advances in artificial intelligence-supported educational platforms also offer opportunities to create more adaptive and realistic learning environments, although these technologies should complement rather than replace professional judgment and experiential learning.[4]

Equally important is recognizing nurses as strategic partners in disaster preparedness and response. Their involvement in planning, coordination, and policy development can strengthen health system resilience and improve the effectiveness of disaster management. Future disasters are inevitable, but inadequate preparedness is not. Reframing disaster nursing education as a resilience strategy rather than solely an academic responsibility may help ensure that nurses are prepared not only to respond to crises, but also to lead through them.[5]

Generative AI Use Declaration

During manuscript preparation, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to assist with language refinement and improvement of readability. The AI tool was not used to generate or analyze

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study data, perform statistical analyses, or determine the scientific conclusions of the study. All AI-assisted content was critically reviewed and edited by the authors, who take full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript.

Competing interests. None.

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