

Acting at a disaster site: views expressed by Swedish nursing students

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There is a common interest in Swedish society in preparing nurses well for disasters. A special course in the basic nurse education programme is devoted to disaster nursing. The aim of this study is to investigate nursing students' knowledge and views of their own action at the disaster site, both in their professional role and as private persons. The present study is a descriptive one based on the students' written answers. The result shows that the students emphasize contacting the overall disaster officer, surveying the situation and carrying out basic life-saving measures in Sweden known as the ABCs. They also stress the importance of staying calm and, to a lesser extent, seeing to the needs of the mentally shocked. Thus the nursing students seem to regard treatment of physical injuries as most important in the disaster situation.

INTRODUCTION

Try to imagine the following situation:

On Sunday 3 March at 9 10 a.m. a Boeing 747 jumbo jet crashes in central Borås, Sweden. The aircraft carries 350 passengers of different nationalities. The air temperature is about 0°C and it is foggy. An explosion in the rear part of the plane has made it lose altitude continually after take-off from Landvetter airport outside Gothenburg. The pilot tries to manoeuvre away from populated areas but fails. The aircraft hits the ground south-west of the general hospital and large parts of it as well as adjacent residential areas within a circle of about a kilometre are affected. Parts of the wrecked plane are spread over a wide area because of the heavy explosion. A large number of casualties must be expected. At the disaster site there are survivors with various injuries of the type caused at a major air crash

The above scenario was the starting point for questions to nursing students regarding major accident or disaster procedure. This raises questions such as: How do student nurses view their own actions on arriving at the disaster

site as nurses in a medical team? How do they view their own actions if arriving at the disaster site as private persons? Answers to these questions were of central interest in the evaluation of knowledge about nursing disaster victims, conducted at the nursing college in Borås, Sweden

Background

Increasing amounts of money have been spent in Sweden in recent years to improve training for medical staff in disaster medicine. This has been manifested in several ways, e.g. by placing more emphasis on related topics within the basic training of nurses. More continuation courses for trained nurses, nursing teachers and doctors have been established. The reason for this is that there is a general interest on the part of society in being well organized to cope with major accidents and disasters. The aim is that professional care is to be given at the scene of an accident to increase the chances of survival for as many injured persons as possible.

An organization has been established in which many parts of the emergency services co-operate at the scene of an accident. One part of it is the services provided by nurses and doctors. This requires knowledge and readiness

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