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## **EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL NEEDS OF PATIENTS IN EMERGENCIES**

Paramedical groups, such as firemen, policemen, lifeguards, rescue squads and ambulance attendants, can reduce appreciably the suffering and deaths which occur as a result of injury and illness. Many groups direct their attention to the critical period between the accident or the onset of the illness and the time definitive care is available from a physician with adequate facilities [2].

Rescue experience has shown the importance of well-trained aid men who can perform resuscitation, administer first aid, and promptly evacuate combat casualties to hospital facilities. People react differently to catastrophic events; the ability to remain calm under all circumstances is not acquired easily. Developing a professional attitude in rescue squad and ambulance personnel takes time, training and experience.

A disaster can change lives within seconds, usually without any warning. The suddenness of the event often leaves the victims temporarily numb as the extent of the disaster often is beyond their initial comprehension. When people become aware that they are dying, the manner in which they face death will vary tremendously from one person to another. Philosophies of life and death also differ. Some people may be fearful and others may look forward to death as a relief from earthly suffering and sorrow. People with strong religious beliefs may feel spiritually exalted, looking forward with great joy to another life. Occasionally a person may feel so depressed and desperate that he becomes suicidal. The age of the patient often influences the manner in which illness or death is accepted. Children usually face death with little fear or sorrow. Teenagers and adults, on the other hand, have a definite dread of death; they desire to experience life and are sad, if not a bit desperate, about leaving it.

It is important for those who are the immediate responders to those affected by the disaster to be aware of this emotional and spiritual reaction of those they have some to help and be able to provide for these needs as well. These needs frequently require the on-site presence of individuals who have been specially trained for such catastrophic events. This reality must be part of any plan to assist the victims of any disaster.

Hospitals have often assigned the responsibility to address emotional and spiritual issues to chaplains or to pastoral teams. Yet others-nurses, physicians, clinicians and other caregivers-play equally important roles. The hospital staff's ability to address patients' emotional and spiritual needs factors in to patients' perceptions of the overall experience of care, the provider, and the organization [4].

For example, as Shelton observed: Patients need to feel that their circumstances and feelings are appreciated and understood by the health care team member without criticism or judgment. If patients feel that the attention they receive is genuinely caring and tailored to meet their needs, it is far more likely that they will develop trust and confidence" [5].

According to national public opinion research, 79% of Americans believe that faith aids in recovery, and 56% believe that faith has helped them recover [3]; 87% of Americans consider religion to be "very important" or "somewhat important" in their life [1].

It should be noted that in the last decade of the twentieth that spiritual and emotional care is as important as medical care when it comes to healing the body.

Example, St. Francis Medical Center celebrates Mass and provides Holy Communion and other sacraments for Catholic patients and their loved ones. The chaplains work to meet these needs within a framework of respect for the views of all religions, denominations, personal philosophies, and cultural traditions.

*Spiritual Care can help:*

- when you need someone to listen to and support you

- when you or your family feels stress, anxiety, uncertainty, grief, anger or sadness
- when you need encouragement
- when you feel alone and lonely
- when you want to talk about spiritual concerns or pray with someone
- when you feel you are losing control
- when you need help to continue religious practices during your hospital stay
- when you need bereavement support [6].

Emotions are an important issue during emergencies too :

- denial (*It cannot be true*)
- anger (Why me?)
- fear (Is my death going to be painful?)
- guilt (If I had not..)
- loneliness (Everyone has deserted me)
- depression (Everything is hopeless)
- acceptance (What must I still do)

In summary, most seriously injured patients find great comfort in the support that they receive from qualified personnel. It is important for rescue personnel to realize that the spiritual and emotional needs of a person may require greater attention than his physical injuries.

### **REFERENCES**

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