

Disaster Nursing

By Mrs. Leila Sharma*

**Draught affects millions of people in the Uttar Pradesh ...
Flood destroys homes rendering thousands homeless ...
Fire destroys hundreds of huts, several casualties ...**

WE often hear about disasters and natural calamities affecting thousands of people. A disaster is unpredictable and unknown. We are aware that it usually brings death and injury, destruction and disruption of life. In all such emergency situations resulting from war, internal strife, accidents or natural calamities immediate relief operations are needed. We express our sympathies for the victims through various forms of help. Those engaged in relief operations include nurses who are specially trained in Disaster Nursing.

The concept of Disaster Nursing is new to us in India. The League of Red Cross in Geneva has issued some guidelines for the participation of nurses in national and international emergency relief actions. It has also emphasised the need for training nurses in disaster nursing for participation in relief operations at national and international levels. It has recommended that the basic as well as post-basic education of the nurses in all countries should include the related teaching in special sciences.

It has asked the National Red Cross Societies to "establish in their respective countries, in co-operation with official and private bodies, a pool of health personnel who could be made available to the International Conference of the Red Cross and the League at their request, or who would be used in accordance with Article 27, of the first 1949 Geneva Convention."

The Nursing Advisory Committee of the Indian Red Cross is currently engaged in drawing out a programme for training nurses for disaster situations.

A disaster is a catastrophic situation in which day to day

patterns of life are suddenly disrupted and people are plunged into helplessness and suffering. As a result, disaster victims may have need for food, clothing, shelter medical and nursing care, or other necessities of life. Disasters frequently create situations in which nursing facilities are inadequate to meet the total needs.

All disasters vary in degree of suddenness of onset, the degree of preparation possible immediately before the disaster strikes.

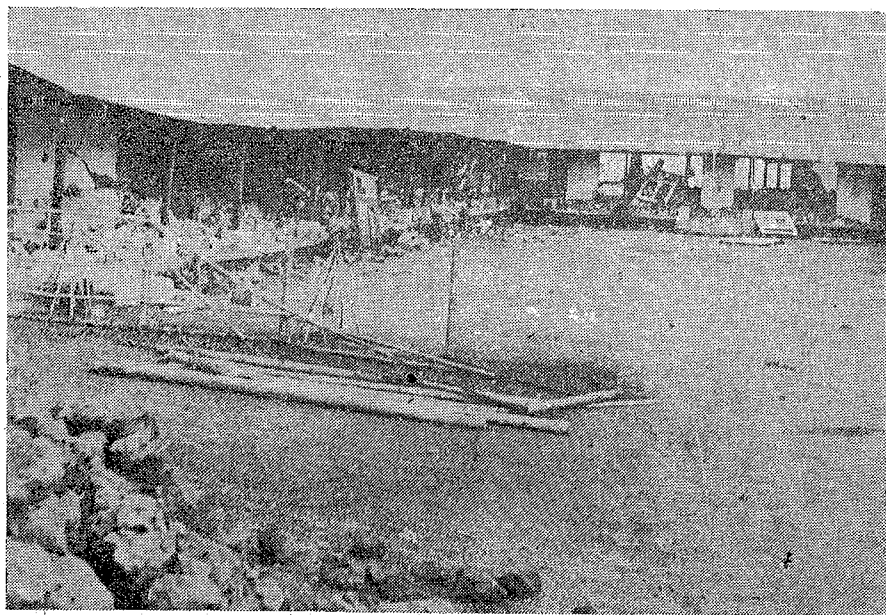
Disaster Nursing is the adaptation of professional nursing skills in recognising and meeting the medical and nursing needs evolving from disaster situation. A nurse's skill and experience in evaluating emergency situations and implementing immediate action prepares her well to serve as a member of a disaster team.

Disasters, whether caused by the fury of a cyclone or enemy aggression have occurred since the beginning of time. Advances in technology have not brought any instant "cure all" for disaster. In fact such advances, along with the population growth and increased urbanisation have tended to raise the potential hazard. In recent years, we have also experienced disasters caused by unrest and civil strife.

It is realistic for nurses to recognise that if adequately trained they can assume important roles in disaster situations and can visualize the condition under which they will be expected to function. There are many types of disasters. Disaster can be natural such as the cyclone which hit A.P. and Orissa, in the last two years, resulting in human suffering and epidemics. The recent Koyana earthquake in Maharashtra is fresh in our minds.

Man-made disasters can also be on a small or large scale. Fires, and explosions can be disastrous.

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A Government Public School destroyed by earthquake in Koyana

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