

Disaster Response

Roberta Flynn, Psy.D., Chair of SDPA Disaster Response Committee

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September 11, 2011 marks the tenth anniversary of the tragic events of 9-11. In the past ten years we have experienced other disasters; wildfires, tsunamis, hurricanes like Katrina, the Haiti earthquake, and, most recently the earthquakes, tsunami and nuclear reactor catastrophe in Japan. Will you be ready for the next disaster?

As a licensed psychologist, and a member of the San Diego Psychological Association, you are eligible to become a member of the Disaster Response Network by joining the San Diego Psychological Association Disaster Response Committee.

Each local Psychological Association in California has a Disaster Response Network (DRN) Chair who also serves as the chair of that Disaster Response Committee. Many psychologists who are members of the SDPA Disaster Response committee are also trained American Disaster Mental Health volunteers. In San Diego, the Chair is Roberta Flynn.

Much disaster response success is related to proper preparation and then appropriate response and follow-up with those affected by the disaster. By federal law, the American Red Cross is the primary provider of services for people affected by disasters and responsible for providing shelter operation, feeding, client case work, health services and disaster mental health. For airport, train and light rail disaster response, federal law mandates through National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), mandates the American Red Cross provide disaster mental health services through the Family Assistance Centers the involved airlines set up. Several SDPA committee members participate in Red Cross exercises held in conjunction with local airports to prepare for those disasters. Essential to being properly prepared is taking the training, participating in the exercises and getting the experience gained by American Red Cross volunteers who are often also SDPA members. If you are interested in Red Cross training, please go to our local chapter, San Diego/Imperial County American Red Cross website at www.sdarc.com.

For Disaster Mental Health (DMH) volunteers the course in Fundamentals of Disaster Mental Health is specifically geared toward laying a foundation for licensed mental health professionals, such as psychologists, to learn how this mental health function operates during a disaster. The American Psychological Association (APA) offers continuing education credits for this training for our license renewal. Many psychologists are surprised to learn that DMH volunteers are not providing counseling or psychotherapy during a disaster.

SDPA's disaster relief committee acts as a resource to other SDPA members and in the community. We may be asked to speak to various groups about issues relating to critical incidents and disasters. One of our committee members, Dr. Carlene Smith, was nominated to attend a meeting due to her leadership skills at

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the national American Red Cross headquarters in Washington, DC in June, 2011. She will represent not only our local Red Cross chapter, but the CPA Disaster Response Network and the San Diego Psychological Association.

Becoming a member of the San Diego Psychological Association Disaster Response Committee, gaining the knowledge, expertise and experience to be able to respond to disasters is gratifying and much appreciated work. Will you be ready for the next disaster? Don't wait until then to think about becoming a member of the Disaster Response Committee. When the next disaster strikes is too late to think about preparation, crucial education and getting experience. To paraphrase an old saying, "When you are neck deep in alligators it's too late to realize you forgot to drain the swamp."