GSA Webinar Series
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How to Help Older Adults Prepare for Disasters

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Webinar Speakers

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Quick Audience Poll

Who is participating in today’s program?
– Medical Practice
– Government
– Public Health
– Academia
– Other

Agenda

• Older adults as a special population
• Pre-disaster risk factors
• Disaster preparedness issues
• Identifying needs pre-disaster
  – Facility: assisted living and nursing home
  – Community: independent and home bound
• Review the vignette
Why is disaster preparedness important?

- The rapid increase in the number of both older adults and natural disasters (record numbers) necessitate action to mitigate catastrophic effects.

Phases and Components of a Disaster

- Pre-Event: Hazard, Risk & Vulnerability Assessment
- Event: Disaster Response Management
  - Response: Initial Response (Assess Impact), Consequence Mgt. (Apply / Manage Resources)
  - Recovery: Systemic Restoration, Demobilize Resources
- Post Event: Consequence Mitigation
- Resources: Mitigation (Prevention) Structural / Non-Structural
- Planning: Preparedness, Capabilities
- Training & Education: Exercises

Initial Response:

- Initial Response: Assess Impact, Mitigate Impact
- Consequence Mgt.: Apply / Manage Resources:
  - Medical Treatment
  - Public Health Protection
  - Psychosocial Interventions
  - Continuity of Health Services
  - Communication Functions
Interdisciplinary Collaborations

Inadequate disaster preparation compromises the ability of people to remain safe and obtain food, water, electricity or access standard medical care post-disaster.

Considerable scientific effort has focused on examining the risk communication and the consequences of disasters and comparatively little attention has been devoted to developing and evaluating methods for enhancing disaster preparedness and recovery.

A Slow Shift in the Status Quo

• Worldwide, older adults consistently have the highest rate of disaster-related deaths relative to the general population
  – Hurricane Katrina 2005: 75% of fatalities were older adults (60 years and older)
Vulnerability Yet Preventability

- Older adults have the highest prevalence rates for:
  - Multiple chronic conditions
  - Limitations in activities of daily living (ADLs)
  - Instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs)
- Most fatalities, injuries, and damage caused by natural disasters can be mitigated with adequate resources and planning

Lessons from Katrina

- 56% of evacuees seen in medical unit were 65+ years old
- Necessity of special planning to accommodate needs of frail older adults who could not function in standard disaster shelters had been overlooked
Are All Older Adults Vulnerable?

- Just as a toddler has different needs and abilities than a teenager - all older adults are not the same.

Developmental Considerations

- Young-old (65-74), Old-old (75-84), and Oldest old (85+)
- Cultural differences – 65 yrs. based on UK and US retirement standards, 60 yrs. based on UN standards, 50 yrs. for Africans based on WHO standards
- Situational differences – 55 yrs. based on homeless status because hardships accelerate aging process
Are All Older Adults Vulnerable?

A 76-year-old male living independently in the community would most likely have different strengths and weaknesses than a 76-year-old male living with assistance in a skilled nursing facility.

- Age in and of itself does not make a person vulnerable

16 Conditions that Hinder Ability of Older Adults to Prepare for Disasters

- Limited access to age-sensitive services
- Problems with the home environment
- Social isolation
- Exclusion from decision-making
- Delays in service delivery
- Separation from family and support systems
- Poor nutrition
- Assumptions by disaster planners that their family will care them
16 Conditions that Hinder Ability of Older Adults to Prepare for Disasters

- Low income/Financial Vulnerability
- Low literacy
- Frail/Physical Decline
- Preexisting mental illness
- Preexisting substance abuse
- Chronic illness
- Sensory or cognitive impairment
- History of exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor

Older Adults as Volunteers

- However, most disaster plans don’t suggest asking older adults to serve as volunteers and planners overlook their lifetime of experience as a valuable resource during disasters.

- Older volunteers can inform disaster planning, provide support during events, and assist with recovery efforts.
Older Adults as Volunteers

Specifically, older adults can:
– provide outreach,
– share information,
– distribute materials,
– offer practical assistance,
– serve as a source of emotional support and models of resilience
– work as peer educators

SWiFT: Seniors Without Families Triage

• Gerontological professionals formed a team to meet the needs of older adults without advocates or family

• SWiFT can be used:
  1) to provide uniform designation disability levels
  2) to provide general guidelines for preparatory steps based on level of disability
10 Recommendations for Best Practices  
(Dyer, 2006, p.20)

**Recommendation One**
Develop a simple, inexpensive, cohesive, integrated and efficient federal tracking system for elders and other vulnerable adults that can be employed at the state and local levels during disasters.
https://www.bcm.edu/pdf/bestpractices.pdf

**Recommendation Two**
Designate separate shelter areas for elders and other vulnerable adults.

**Recommendation Three**
Involve gerontologists (geriatricians, geriatric nurse practitioners, gerontological social workers, or other aging experts, etc.) in all aspects of emergency preparedness and care delivery.
Biopsychosocial Approach to Preparedness

**Recommendation Four**
Involves region-specific social services, medical and public health resources, volunteers, and facilities in pre-event planning for elders and vulnerable adults.

**Recommendation Five**
Involves gerontologists (geriatricians, geriatric nurse practitioners, gerontological social workers, or other aging experts, etc.) in the training and education of front-line workers and other first responders about frail adults’ unique needs.

**Recommendation Six**
Utilizes a public health triage system like the SWIFT Tool® for elders and other vulnerable populations in pre- and post-disaster situations.


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Communication and Safety Preparedness Recommendations

**Recommendation Seven**
The personnel charged with overseeing elders and vulnerable adults should maintain a clear line of communication with the shelter’s central command. Communication within the shelter should involve technology such as cellular telephones and walkie-talkies.

**Recommendation Eight**
Provide protection from abuse and fraud to elders and other vulnerable adults.

**Recommendation Nine**
Develop coordinated regional plans for evacuations of residents of long-term care facilities and for homebound persons with special needs (i.e., ventilator-dependent adults.)

**Recommendation Ten**
Conduct drills and research on disaster preparedness plans and the use of a triage tool, such as SWIFT, to ensure their effectiveness and universality.

Information Barriers at all Levels and Phases of a Disaster

- Personal Level
- System Level
- Provider Level

Language Barriers

- Pre-made signage and oral directions developed for people with vision difficulties or low literacy
- Translators and volunteers should be identified and invited to participate as members of preparedness teams to bridge language barriers
Interdisciplinary Collaborations

- Development and implementation of programs where the needs, wants, abilities, culture, and resources of the **target audience** are not fully considered.

**EXAMPLE** - Car manufacturers know their target audience before car is on sales floor

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Interdisciplinary Collaborations

- Difficulties associated with disaster preparation and access to services post-disaster can arise from an **institutional “top-down” design** (i.e., content developed by experts from a single agency with a unique perspective).

**EXAMPLE** - How to stay cool during extreme heat events
Disaster Literacy

What can be done to better educate and prepare the public for disasters?

• Structure the delivery of information as if everyone has limited disaster literacy
  – You cannot tell literacy level by looking at a person
  – Higher reading skills ≠ understanding or ability to take action
  – Anxiety/stress can reduce ability to understand and use disaster information
  – Everyone benefits from clear communications

Disaster Literacy

Disaster Literacy is defined as an individual's capacity to read, understand, and use information to make informed decisions and follow instructions in the context of mitigating, preparing, responding, and recovering from a disaster.
Disaster Literacy

- THE GOOD NEWS IS - existing disaster preparedness materials are usually comprehensive and accurate, but BAD NEWS - many require a high reading level to understand the dense and sometimes complex text.

- The mismatch between the literacy demands of existing print materials and the literacy skills of many adults limits their ability to understand and effectively use potentially life-saving information.

Visuals Improve Understanding/Recall

- Pictographs and demonstrations are most helpful to people with low literacy and people who are visual learners
- Most drawings and photos in print materials are used to beautify and not to further the understanding of the key messages
Given these Innovative Approaches

Why are people still unprepared?????
• Disasters are a low base rate event
• It happens to other people
• Too expensive to prepare for
• I’ll do it tomorrow
• Women were more likely to want to prepare/evacuate and men more likely to hinder their efforts

EXAMPLE - Female named hurricanes resulted in less preparedness and more deaths compared to male named hurricanes – female threat not taken seriously
Educational Materials

- Written materials, when used alone, will not adequately inform and change behaviors
- People prefer receiving **key messages from a person** (neighbor, official) with accompanying pamphlets
- Focus needs to be “need-to-know” & “need-to do”
- People with low literacy tend to ask fewer questions
- Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level and Flesch Reading Ease can be used to evaluate readability and grade level

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**Case Vignette: Pre-disaster Planning**

Hurricane Charley is expected to strike Florida in approximately 24 hours. Susan Munoz is responsible for her 87 year-old father, Jose Munoz, who was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease 3 years ago. The TV is on and the weather broadcaster is urging people to evacuate the area. Mr. Munoz is agitated, disoriented, and keeps repeating, “Where are you taking me? I don’t want to leave home. I want to stay.”
Ms. Munoz is unsure where the emergency shelter is located. She anticipates that the shelter will be loud, chaotic, and teeming with people. This environment would definitely exacerbate her father’s distress. Her mother, who passed away 2 months ago, had been her father’s primary caregiver. New as a caregiver, Ms. Munoz realizes when packing that she has only 3 days’ worth of her father’s incontinence products and a limited supply of his numerous medications. The main thought playing over and over in her head is, “No one prepared me for this.”

Vignette Questions

• How could Ms. Munoz have helped her father better prepare?
• What should she add to an emergency preparedness kit that is tailored to his illness and needs?
• How could she manage her father’s agitation and distress?
• Other challenges as a result of an evacuation?
• How could she deal with the potential for her father to wander in an unfamiliar location?
• What kinds of self-care techniques could Ms. Munoz use to manage her own stress?
Disasters and Dementia

- 69% of older persons in long-term care facilities have dementia
  - Dementia affects ability to manage safely and to negotiate survival outside the remit of full-time institutional care
  - Frail older adults in nursing homes
    - Highest rates of fatalities compared to general population and increased rates of depression and anxiety

9 Tips for Educating and Preparing Older Adults for Disasters

- One size does not fit all
- Consider older adult culture
- Use plain language
- Limit information (3-5 key points) on handouts
- Be specific and concrete - not general (manual can opener)
- Use pictographs
- Evaluate – pilot test materials prior to publication/dissemination
- Be positive, hopeful, empowering
GSA Disasters and Older Adults
Special Interest Group

• Join the Disasters and Older Adults
  – Group started 5 years ago
  – Thursday, November 17, 5:30-7:00pm
  “Disasters and Older Adults Special Interest
  Group Session: Disaster Preparedness for
  Older Adults: Best Practices in Training”

Additional Resource

• National Center for Disaster Medicine and
Public Health’s Caring for Older Adults in
Disasters: A Curriculum for Health
Professionals (2015)
https://ncdmph.usuhs.edu/KnowledgeLearning/2015-OAC.htm
Questions?
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- We will not be using the “Raise Hand” feature today
- Please use the Questions feature accessible on the right hand side of your screen
- If we do not get to all of the questions today, we will email responses after the webinar

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In an effort for continual improvement, we would like to hear your thoughts. Please provide feedback by clicking the survey link at the end of the webinar.

Thank you again—we hope you enjoyed the program!