

HUMAN REACTIONS AT MAJOR EMERGENCIES

Knowledge of a few basic surgical principles enables many non-medical people to give first aid for physical injuries. Similarly, awareness of certain psychological principles greatly simplifies the emergency care extended to terrified, depressed, panic-prone or grief-stricken victims of accidents and disasters.

It is important to be able to identify psychological casualties promptly. Human behavior varies considerably after any catastrophe; there are over-active people who interfere with rescue efforts apathetic people who aimlessly pick at the rubble, people who spread rumor and despair, other who become mute or disorganized, victims of hysteria, and even a few people who are able to exert a calming and helpful influence.

Many persons become frightened, exhausted, excited, uncomfortable, or ill when subjected to the stress of a fire, flood, or other large-scale emergency: occasionally psychological victims are encountered at the scene of minor rescue incidents. Other people, despite their distress, are moved by fear, anger, or love to sustained physical exertion, selfless acts, or heroic deeds. Mentally ill persons are often encountered by rescue personnel; the majority of these patients are only mildly disturbed and require recognition and attention, but a minimum of care.

Often at accidents or other catastrophes the victims of psychological injuries may require a greater amount of first aid than those subjected to physical damage. Awareness by rescue personnel of common psychological problems will greatly increase their ability to handle terrified or depressed accident victims.

Psychologists who have studied many disasters have been able to analyze human reactions to emergency situations and have been able to make some broad conclusions about these reactions. They find that the first effect of a disaster on human beings is to stun them or make them immobile. People are momentarily stunned by an unexpected situation; there is usually a transitory sensation of paralysis and helplessness. Providing it does not last too long, this reaction can be helpful in giving a person time to evaluate the situation and decide the proper action to take.

In case of a sudden disaster, all of those involved will be stunned, but most people will probably adapt themselves quickly and respond to the demands of the situation. Some people, however, will be overwhelmed and their reactions will become exaggerated, even dangerous to themselves and other. Foreknowledge of the nature of the conditions and advance training in responding to the situation will considerably increase chances of reacting correctly to a disaster situation. This obviously points up the need for preplanning, training, and drills. When a threat of danger is perceived, the natural response of everyone is fear. When fear is present, people tend to react in terms of previously learned methods of action. They revert to habit. The primary psychological factor behind fire drills, training exercises, and standard operating procedures is, thus, to establish good habits and effective response.

The reactions which may be encountered as a result of a catastrophe have been separated into categories, largely for the sake of clarity, and because individuals obviously react in different ways. One disaster victim may show some features of several categories either simultaneously or at successive stages of his reaction. For example, the initially numbed depressed victim may swing spontaneously toward excessive activity and great distraction somewhat later. These variations need not be too troublesome in psychological first aid, since rescue personnel will be responsible for treating the casualty as they find him and for only a relatively short period of time thereafter.

Normal Reaction

Leaders

Suggestibles

Helpless and Ineffective

Panic-Prone

Over-reaction

Conversion Hysteria

No matter how unfounded or ridiculous a person's reaction to disaster may appear, he is entitled to have his own feelings. A person's reaction to disaster is depended upon his past experiences, obviously different for each individual. A casualty may be better aide by letting him know that his feelings are understood, than

by trying to persuade him that he has no reason to feel the way he does. The rescuer's job is to attempt to establish as much contact with him as possible, calmly and sympathetically.

Literature:

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1. Lawrence W. Erven First Aid. - 135 p.
2. http://www.allsafety.ru/first_aid