



When, Not If, Disaster Strikes – Be Prepared!

By Christina Brugman, HTCP

Wildfires. Earthquakes. Floods. Tornadoes. Hurricanes. Blizzards. These often strike without warning. Images of these distressing disasters haunt us from the TV and the newspaper. Some of them, unfortunately, we have experienced personally. As healers we respond with compassion and wish for a way to help. We know that Healing Touch would alleviate the suffering of those affected and support the difficult work of the responders.

First, we should distinguish between an emergency and a disaster. An emergency is a situation in which life or property is threatened and the local police, fire, and medical resources are adequate to the needs. A disaster is a large-scale event in which life and property are threatened and the scope is far beyond what the local resources can handle. It could be days before they are able to respond to individual citizen's needs.

What you might not know is that the response to each emergency or disaster in the United States is organized according to the **Incident Command System (ICS)** developed over many years by FEMA. This means that response to the house fire down the street or the town devastated by a tornado uses that same system which can be expanded or contracted as needed.

It's tempting to imagine we could show up, massage table in hand, and be welcomed. This is not realistic. However, we can take steps to become involved and find ways to bring Healing Touch into such situations. The best idea is to get involved in local organizations that already provide emergency and disaster response. Healing Touch will come to the aid of local communities by you, a local resident. If you become involved with organizations that have a national presence, you could be deployed to disasters anywhere in the United States if that is something that interests you.

Preparation and involvement need to start at the most local level. Like the flight attendant tells you, “put your own oxygen mask on first before you help others.”

Besides being important for personal preparedness and for the good of your own community in time of need, being involved in organizations that offer training and volunteer opportunities gives you, as HT practitioners, connection and legitimacy. By becoming part of a preparation organization, taking the training, and participating in drills, you will have the chance to introduce Healing Touch to your fellow participants, neighbors and leaders.

A disaster response team is built from the inside out. Begin at the local level: in your home, in your car, and in your neighborhood. Expand your training and volunteer connections to include local organizations that already have standing and access to disaster situations. You can bring your special gift of Healing Touch with you in all that you do. Prepare now! The disaster you prepare for may be your own!

AT HOME

Do you have emergency supplies in your home and a plan for your family? Can you get along for three or more days without outside assistance? Here is a link to “**Three Days, Three Ways**” to get you thinking along those lines. www.govlink.org/3days3ways

What if a disaster occurs when you are not at home? Do you have an emergency kit in your car or office that would see you through the several days it might take for you to make your way home?

The Red Cross offers a handy **Disaster Preparedness Calendar** which walks you through making a family kit step-by-step over a period of 6 months so you don't break the bank by buying everything at once. Here is a link: www.nwnc-redcross.org/PreparednessCalendar.pdf Pre-packaged home and car emergency kits are available through many companies. Just google “emergency kits” and you will find a multitude of outfits that sell them.

IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Next, what about your neighbors? The “golden hour” after an earthquake or other disaster is the time in which small fires can be eliminated before they become conflagrations. Lives can be saved by preventing shock or managing bleeding. The emergency responders may not be able to get to you for several days. What can neighbors do to help each other?

In our area we have something called “**Map Your Neighborhood**” which invites neighbors to come together to plan for a disaster. See what you have in your municipality or county. If you can't find something similar, all the materials can be downloaded from the State of Washington website at www.emd.wa.gov/myn/index.shtml. You can “do it yourself.”

More sophisticated training and preparation are available through **Citizen Corps and Community Emergency Response Teams** (CERT). In CERT training you learn basic search and rescue, fire suppression, triage, and managing injuries until help is available. The 8 or 9 week course is invaluable in preparing to help in your community in the event of a disaster. It also provides a connection beyond your immediate neighborhood. Follow the link for more information: www.citizencorps.gov. Contact your city or county to find out when the CERT classes are being offered.

Don't be shy. In this time of budget cuts, emergency management personnel are being laid off, and classes are sometimes hard to find. If enough people call and ask for the training, they can often find a grant to fund it. Keep calling.

BEYOND THE NEIGHBORHOOD

At the county and federal level, you can become involved in the **Medical Reserve Corps**. www.medicalreservecorps.gov/HomePage

This organization prepares for pandemics, disasters, hospital evacuations, and such. Medical and non-medical personnel are needed. Practice drills provide experience in setting up field hospitals, immunization clinics, transporting hospital patients, etc. There are usually excellent training opportunities. The local Medical Reserve Corps are often situated in the Public Health department of your county.

The **American Red Cross** offers a multitude of training classes, disaster preparation supplies, and opportunities to help in small and large disasters. www.redcross.org

Green Cross is an organization dedicated to helping people deal with trauma and compassion fatigue. They offer training for those who would like to deploy to disaster situations to help both victims and responders. www.greencross.org

Anyone with a serious interest in responding to an emergency or disaster should learn about the **Incident Command System** (ICS). FEMA offers free online courses which are available to everyone. Check them out at www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/NIMSTrainingCourses.shtm#item1

The ICS 100b course is the most general, but there are others that may be of interest to you, too, particularly the one for health care facilities. Finish the course, take the test, and get the certificate. The certificate will be important when you join disaster preparation organizations.

WE'LL BE THERE

Once the search and rescue phase of a disaster is over, there will be a time and place for Healing Touch practitioners to offer their special gift. Folks are hanging out in a shelter, waiting to hear what happened to their house. People are in a field hospital recovering from injuries. Firefighters are taking a break before going back on the line. Doctors and nurses are limp with exhaustion. Just your grounded, heart-centered presence will have a profound effect,

and a few simple techniques in a quiet corner can make all the difference to whomever you touch.

About the author:



Christina Brugman is a HTCP who lives in Kirkland, Washington. She is a member of the Public Health Reserve Corps, has completed CERT training, and coordinates disaster preparation for her neighborhood.