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Title

Librarian's Role in Disaster Preparedness and Response

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Abstract

No country or area is safe from natural or man-made disasters. And they always happen when least expected. Even in peaceful time and disaster frequently-occurring areas like China, the bomb explosions, typhoon, drought and flood as well as the outbreak of SARS that occurred in southern China in 2003 showed that preparedness is essential. As information professionals or medical librarians in hospitals, the response to natural disasters or new disease requires a much broader range of tools and technical knowledge. This need also requires that those who develop technical information for disaster planning maintain a broader perspective of how the information will be used and what the priorities are for developing new information. In addition, the ability to communicate information within a context has become more critical. Effective response of information professionals to disasters will depend on three important aspects of action: (1) disaster preparedness; (2) active involvement in the recovery of materials, (3) training and recovery exercise.

The objective of this paper is to provide an overview of the content included in a natural disaster course designed for librarians and information professionals in the Medical Library of Chinese People's Liberation Army. It also presents some issues to help those who traditionally collect and interpret technical information to better understand how their information is used in planning for and responding to disasters or new disease.

Being aware of that librarians are likely points of first contact for professionals and consumers seeking information about natural disasters and preparedness in general, the library where the authors of this paper work has developed a course that can be adapted to the needs of information professionals in a variety of settings. The intent is to prepare librarians to become even more active participants in community preparedness before, during, and after a crisis. The content of the course includes the history and background of natural disasters, an introduction to preparedness planning and principles, knowledge about participation in the community relief and information delivery process as well as an overview of natural disasters and resources. Course content is delivered through lectures and demonstrations, and interactive exercises.

Teaching this course has led to additional invitations to present it to some other public or special libraries. These desires demonstrate the value and significance librarians place on learning about where to find accurate, current, and reliable information about natural disaster resources. Interaction with the course attendees and the course evaluations provide qualitative methods of evaluating the course content and instructional methods.

Information professionals anticipate that information resources will be crucial to protecting public health in the

event of a disaster. The course content delivers vital information and provides knowledge for coping in uncertain and dangerous times.