



PSYCHOLOGY AND THE TSUNAMI

Introduction

CPA has been involved in the Tsunami relief effort. However, it has been a very different experience for the Association. Unlike a Canadian or North American based disaster (9/11, hurricane, flood, airplane crash) or crisis (SARS, influenza epidemic), the Tsunami occurred overseas. As a result, direct information and services to Canadians in Canada is less of an issue. Rather, it is working with other organizations and groups to add support to the relief efforts abroad.

Canadian Based Response

The Ontario Government in co-operation with the Ontario Psychological Association and the Ontario Branch of the Canadian Red Cross set up a telephone crisis response service for families of Tsunami victims in Ontario. Congratulations to both the OPA and the Ontario Government for responding quickly to a domestic need.

The Mental Health Support Network of Canada met with Federal Government Officials to discuss the role the network could play. It has decided to rewrite some of the Network's materials designed for domestic disasters to provide information for Canadians and those in other countries. This is currently being finalized.

International Based Response

CPA has had direct discussions with Federal Government Officials and relief agency staff regarding the role of psychological skills and knowledge as well as psychologists in the Tsunami relief effort. The discouraging reality is that the Government and the agencies had not prepared for the inclusion of psychologists and psychological knowledge and skills in the first response effort. In other words, Foreign Affairs, the Canadian International Development Agency, DART, the Red Cross, etc. prepare to attend to the physical, biomedical and security aspects of relief as a first response and include psychological aspects later, upon

further assessment. This situation underlines the Canadian cultural bias that is evident in many aspects of health care and disaster relief.

It is not possible to imagine that Tsunami victims did not experience significant psychological trauma the moment the wave struck. This trauma for many magnified significantly over time as the real impact of the disaster was realized. People lost many if not all of their immediate and extended family, social support networks (neighbourhoods, villages and towns), governmental and service infrastructures and their economic base. The naturally occurring and effective social networks that help individuals overcome the psychological aspects of disasters were in many cases devastated.

CPA's goal in discussions with agencies and the Federal Government is to provide information and services if and when called upon and to open more dialogue to address this important lack of services. We need to change fundamentally the way Canada responds to disasters in order to ensure people get the psychological services they so desperately need in a timely fashion.

CPA's position includes the need for:

1. Psychological information on trauma for victims and indigenous workers
2. Training and support for indigenous workers to help them "assess" their fellow citizens, to help those they are capable of helping and to refer those they are unable to help to appropriate services
3. The development of appropriate secondary services to deal with victims' post traumatic psychological reactions
4. A special focus on the psychological reactions of children and youth
5. Community development information and support to rebuild viable social networks and communities
6. Psychological information on trauma for foreign relief workers to help them recognize signs and symptoms in victims, themselves and other workers, both foreign and indigenous.
7. Support services for indigenous and foreign relief workers
8. The inclusion of psychological knowledge and skills and psychologists in the comprehensive disaster relief plans of the Canadian Government and major relief agencies. This inclusion must begin at the point of first response and continue as needed and appropriate.

Finally, CPA through Rodney Hancock at McFarlane Rowlands Insurance has arranged for temporary malpractice coverage for Canadian Psychologists insured under the CPA/CPAP Insurance Plan who

volunteer to work outside of their jurisdiction for a short period of time in disaster relief. If you would like to take advantage of this extra coverage, you must contact McFarlane Rowlands. This additional coverage is provided at CPA's request. It is a non cost rider, therefore there was or is no increase in premiums.

If you have suggestions or feedback regarding the Tsunami relief effort, please let us know at cpta@cpa.ca.