



Disaster Response and Recovery: Rehabilitation has an key role elsewhere, can we do more in Vanuatu ?

Dr Tracey Symmons

Townsville University Hospital, Townsville, Australia

Abstract text

Introduction: Vanuatu has a high frequency of natural disasters, that may worsen with climate change. These disasters can result in substantial number of survivors with disabling conditions, which places a substantial burden of care on families and communities, and economic burden on the country. In addition, people living with disability and vulnerable populations have a much greater mortality in disaster settings. In Vanuatu, there is unmet need for rehabilitation care for those living with pre-existing disabilities and as well as many other chronic conditions. During and after disaster, rehabilitation services are in greater demand due to the influx of injuries and an increase in communicable diseases, as well as challenges providing care for persons living with pre-existing disabilities and chronic conditions who are unable to access their usual supports.

Methods: A literature review was undertaken to review the role of Rehabilitation Medicine in disaster settings. Recent peer reviewed literature was selected with a search of key words: Rehabilitation, natural disasters, cyclones, earthquakes, spinal cord injury.

Results: 10 relevant papers were identified which were specifically relevant to rehabilitation in disaster settings. 4 related to the Australian context, the others related to disaster preparedness and response in international disaster settings.

Discussion: People injured or affected by disasters may need enhanced rehabilitation services to enable improved function, return to the community and an optimised quality of life. There are positive benefits for integrating rehabilitation services within health care systems including better clinical outcomes including having less complications and shortened length of stay. Evidence strongly supports the early involvement of rehabilitation health professionals (doctors, physiotherapists, nurses) in disaster response and recovery for minimising mortality and disability and improving clinical outcomes and quality of life for disaster survivors. The challenge for Vanuatu is how to take the steps to include a rehabilitation approach.