

Healthcare staff too stressed to deal with disasters



New research published in the journal *Procedia Engineering* further justifies the need for hospitals to focus more on making working conditions less stressful for their staff. Researchers say that high levels of stress and a lack of motivation among healthcare staff could result in hospitals having to shut down in the wake of a major incident such as flooding or an earthquake.

The research, led by Anglia Ruskin University, examined studies from across the world. It found that the capacity of clinical and non-clinical staff in hospitals and clinics to deal with incidents such as floods, earthquakes or other natural hazard is severely limited by a high workload and challenging targets which result in high levels of psychological stress.

The findings also suggested that some staff are left feeling unmotivated and unattached to their workplace, meaning they are less likely to take the initiative in such a scenario and may even avoid coming into work.

"Healthcare services in many countries across the world are under severe strain, which leaves little opportunity for staff to be trained in disaster resilience. Yet healthcare is among the most critical services in any country during and after a major incident has occurred," said Dr. Nebil Achour, lead author and Senior Lecturer in Healthcare Management at Anglia Ruskin University.

Day-to-day workloads and performance targets leave hospital employees with less flexibility. This explains why they suffer from psychological and physical stress, which makes them unable to respond to any further stress associated with major hazards, according to Dr. Achour.

"Many staff members do not feel attached to their workplace and do not feel that they have enough flexibility to take the initiative and lead their own way," the doctor said. "This in turn also makes them less motivated to learn the extra skills needed to deal with a catastrophic event." Only 21% of participants in the research expressed complete satisfaction with their jobs and workplace.

All these factors, Dr. Achour emphasised, expose healthcare services to major risk of staff shortage and thus inoperability when a major hazard does strike.

Source: Anglia Ruskin University
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