Changes in the Face of Hurricane Harvey

Purpose of Initiative: The devastation and aftermath of Hurricane Harvey dramatically changed the role of the Faith Community Nurse in South Texas. This experience has led to the development of an expanded Health Ministry Team composed of a Faith Community Nurse, a city official, first responders, church members, and pastors to prioritize population health in the event of a natural disaster. The collaboration of these entities established a progressive approach in educating and promoting the health and well-being of the community involved by sharing critical information and organizing resources. Because of their unique knowledge and skills, the Health Ministry Team will now be able to provide education and information to help during pre-storm preparation and post storm relief. The team could be used for any natural disaster. This team of professionals will be able to provide citizens with information to aid in recovery efforts with an approach that is focused on mind, body, and spirit.

Design: The Health Ministry Team was strategically engineered to encapsulate a strong group of leaders with like goals to network, coordinate knowledge, distinguish facts from rumors, and assist with community rebuild. The Health Ministry Team members include: Faith Community Nurse, Pastor, Fire Department Captain, Police Chief, City Official, and including local citizens representative of an ecumenical effort, recognizing that each community is a unique entity.

Population Served: The local church and the community impacted by Hurricane Harvey or before, during and after any natural disaster.

Outcomes: A Health Ministry Team comprised of leaders and community members allows the group to share first-hand knowledge on a personal level with each other and the rest of the community, thus decreasing the spread of false rumors and aid in helping those in need more promptly and individually. Local long-term recovery efforts included the establishment of focus groups. A children’s coalition was established to create, support, and improve care and resources for children and families. A crisis support group was made available to the community to share resources. The role of the Health Ministry Team in long term recovery continues to evolve as new needs continue to present themselves. The team remains open to the opportunity to provide continuing education, improve resources and plans, and maintain and update all information on an on-going basis.

Implications for practice: The Health Ministry Team focus of mind, body and spirit includes active involvement in long term recovery efforts as well as being available in the event of natural disaster. The Health Ministry was recently put to task when a tornado hit a small neighboring town. The Health Ministry Team swept into action and was able to assist six families with immediate needs of food, clothing and support. The team continues to have open communication and ongoing learning to improve our team as well as helping the community.