

What to do in a disaster: New must-have guide for health professionals

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Professor Gerry FitzGerald is from QUT's School of Public Health and is editor of new book Disaster Health Management. Credit: QUT Marketing & Communication/Patria Jannides

A world-first grass-roots guide for doctors, nurses, paramedics and other health professionals will give them a much-needed common language to

deal with the growing number of natural and man-made disasters worldwide.

Edited by Professor Gerry FitzGerald, from QUT's School of Public Health, and launched yesterday by Rob Cameron Acting Director General of Emergency Management Australia, *Disaster Health Management: a primer for students and practitioners* covers events including Cyclone Yasi, the US Ebola outbreak, Victoria's bushfires, Iceland's 2010 volcano eruption, Tokyo's Sarin nerve gas attack and the 2010 Haiti earthquake.

"Whether it's fires, floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, influenza outbreaks, terrorist attacks or industrial accidents; there is always a disaster somewhere in the world," said Professor FitzGerald.

"Disaster health management is an emerging but rapidly growing field focusing on health problems caused by disasters throughout the continuum of prevention, preparation, response and recovery.

"There are plenty of research-based texts out there but none present a common language and consistent approach to the principles and practices involved in disaster health management.

"What, for example, is a disaster? The International Red Cross defines it as a sudden, calamitous event that seriously disrupts the functioning of a community or society and causes human, material, and economic or environmental losses that exceed the community's or society's ability to cope using its own resources.

"Our book features the work of 54 authors from across the world and provides new players in disaster health with an overview of the core principles and practice underpinning disaster health management throughout the continuum of getting ready, responding and recovering."

Acting Director-General of Emergency Management Australia Rob Cameron welcomed the book as a vital addition to the [disaster management](#) field.

"We must learn from past events and ensure that we as a community are as prepared and resilient as we can be, and it's through collaborations such as this book that we are able to apply lessons from the past towards mitigating the effects of future disasters," Mr Cameron said.

Professor Fitzgerald said emergency and disaster management was such a broad field of activity and people, covering areas including clinical care, management and scientific research.

"It is often difficult for people from diverse professional backgrounds to understand the complexity of this field and the concepts and principles," he said.

"The aim of this text is to craft a common language that students and practitioners from different professional fields may use to gain a common understanding of the principles and practice of disaster management; at least in Australia but hopefully around the world."

The book outlines definitions for the language of disaster; words like risk, risk [management](#), mass casualty, resilience, hazard, protection and vulnerability. To emphasize its message, a range of case studies of past disasters in Australia and overseas are used.

"It's interesting to look at Hobart's Tasman Bridge disaster of 1975. As well as causing the death of 12 people, around 40,000 people were cut off from the city's hospitals, schools, businesses and government offices. It took 34 months for the Tasman Bridge to be reopened so the disaster actually hastened the development of commercial and public facilities in the eastern suburbs of the city," Professor Fitzgerald said.

"Fast forward to 2011 and Severe Tropical Cyclone Yasi in Queensland and you discover the emergency response directly led to the establishment of the Asbestos Working Group which in turn has improved responses to public [health](#) risks associated with future [disasters](#)

"Ultimately the text demonstrates how leadership can make a difference in building a community's resilience before, during and after a disaster."

Disaster Health Management: a primer for students and practitioners is published by Routledge and as well as Professor FitzGerald its editors were Mike Tarrant, Peter Aitken and Marie Frederiksen.

It's available at the QUT Bookshops or via Routledge online and profits from the sale of the text will be donated to Médecins Sans Frontières.

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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