Objectives

- Describe psychological phases of a disaster
- Identify unique psychological effects of radiation disasters
- Define psychological first aid skills
Disaster Mental Health Training

- Important for:
  - Public health professionals
  -Clinicians
  -First responders
  -Volunteers
- Disaster preparedness training can reduce the risk of post-traumatic stress disorder for workers and volunteers who respond to disasters.

Radiation Disasters

- Psychological consequences of radiation disasters are unique, serious, and can be more severe and longer lasting than physical and economic consequences.

Role of Public Health

- Screening of persons for external contamination
- Establish registry of information about all persons screened for long term monitoring
- Provide initial psychological first aid
Public Conceptions

- Intense public fear of radiation
- Radiation not well understood
  - Invisible, silent, odorless
  - Only detectable using specialized equipment

Reactions to Three Mile Island

Click to play video

David Houts
12 years old at time of accident

Reactions to Three Mile Island

Click to play video

Dr. Peter Houts
Associate Professor of Behavioral Science
Penn State University College of Medicine
Phases of a Disaster Model

Psychological Phases of Disaster

Phases of a Radiation Disaster

Psychological Phases of a Radiation Disaster

Adverse Psychological Effects

- Affects contaminated and non-contaminated
- Several factors may contribute:
  - Lack of understanding of radiation and the screening process
  - Delayed impact of exposure
  - Mistrust of officials who are unable to provide consistent and clear-cut guidance regarding safety measures
Common Responses

- Stress
- Panic
- Grief
- Questioning
  - “Why has God done this to me?”

Mental Health Consequences

- Common in survivors of disasters:
  - Generalized anxiety disorder
  - Post-traumatic stress disorder
  - Major depression
  - Alcohol and medication abuse
  - “Psychosomatic bind”
  - Lingering doubts about safety
  - Social stigma, loss of social support

Social Stigma

- Stigmatization of persons who are:
  - Contaminated
  - Potentially contaminated
Recovery Post Goiânia

Click to play video

Dr. Jose Rozental
Former Director in Brazilian National Commission of Nuclear Energy

Social Stigma Post Goiânia

- Residents protested against caskets being buried in the local cemetery
- When residents traveled to other parts of the country they were turned away
- Agricultural products from the region were banned – Japan: concerns about beef and rice

High-risk Groups

- Children
- Pregnant women
- Mothers with young children
- Evacuees
- Older persons
- People with mental illness
- Those with limited social support
- Emergency workers
Providing Psychological First Aid

What Can you Do to Help?

- You actually already have many essential attributes and skills that you can bring to assist survivors:
  - Good active listening skills
  - Patience
  - A caring attitude
  - Trustworthiness
  - Being approachable
  - Cultural sensitivity
  - A non-judgmental attitude
  - Flexibility and tolerance during chaos

Psychological First Aid Basics

- Get the person to actively engage with you
- Promote:
  - Safety
  - Calm
  - Connectedness
  - Self-efficacy
  - Help
What to Do

- Immediately introduce yourself and state your intent
- Remain calm yourself
- Communicate calmly and clearly
- Stand or sit squarely facing the survivor
- Keep your posture “open”
  - no crossed arms or legs
- Lean forward
- Keep eye contact

What not to Do?

- Force people to share their stories with you
- Give simple reassurances
- Try to “explain” why you think they have suffered
- Break a promise or lie
- Criticize existing services

When to Refer to a Specialist?

- A survivor hints or talks openly about suicide
- There is a possibility of child abuse
- There is a possibility of criminal activity
- Other cases for referral can be when:
  - The survivor seems to be socially isolated
  - The survivor feels persecuted
- Drug or alcohol dependent individuals
- Individuals engaging in risky/threatening behavior
- Individuals for whom it is difficult to maintain contact
Always Remember!

- As a responder, you have to take care of yourself before you can take care of others!

Psychological First Aid in Action

Click to play video

Any Questions or Comments?
Summary Points

- People have an intense fear of radiation, which can intensify the psychological response
- The social stigma experienced by victims in radiological disasters increases their need for services
- You are vital in the response to a disaster event!

Summary Points

- You make a difference in physical and psychological consequences for survivors
- Prepare yourself to anticipate stress reactions
- Anticipate your own emotional and physical response
- Incorporate a mental health component into your preparations for disasters, especially radiological ones.

Adapted from CDC course WB1645

http://www2a.cdc.gov/TCEOnline/registration/detailpage.asp?res_id=2490
Radiological Terrorism: A Toolkit for Public Health Professionals

- Resources for Public Health
  - Virtual Community Reception Center
  - Population Monitoring Guide
  - EPA Risk Communication Guide
  - Contaminated Decedents Guide
  - Radiation Survey DVD
  - Webcasts
  - Fact Sheets
  - Psychological First Aid Self-Study

Radiological Terrorism: A Toolkit for Emergency Services Clinicians

- Resources for Clinicians:
  - JIT Training
  - Pocket Guides
  - Radiation Triage Chart
  - Fact Sheets
  - Webcasts
  - Self-study Training
  - Psychological First Aid

To order complimentary toolkits:
Email: cdcinfo@cdc.gov or
Call: 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636);
TTY: (888) 232-6348

Selected material available online:
www.emergency.cdc.gov/radiation