

GENERAL ACUPUNCTURE



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Public Health Initiatives Bring Acupuncture to Natural Disaster Survivors

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Acupuncturists and other volunteers responded to the recent natural disasters around the country and helped create a safety net for thousands of citizens in Joplin, Miss., Minneapolis, Minn., and Springfield, Mass. Tornadoes affected each of these areas in late May and early June of this year, causing loss of lives, destruction of homes, and challenges to the livelihood and well-being of residents.

The response of the acupuncture community was immediate and strong, bringing healing energy from the intense trauma caused by the tornadoes. Using models of organization and treatment developed by Acupuncturists Without Borders, organizers in each of these areas mobilized local resources and provided compassionate care to survivors, rescue workers, and other local responders.

We interviewed organizers from each of these sites, noting similarities and differences about each situation. Although logistics of organizing and locating services were time-consuming and sometimes frustrating, the response from those receiving acupuncture treatments has been and continues to be gratifying and overwhelmingly positive.

Insights from the Field

Joplin, Missouri

On May 22, a tornado devastated the town of Joplin, Miss. Over 140 people were killed by the force of the storm and subsequent disasters. Thousands of homes were destroyed, as well as businesses and other parts of the city's infrastructure.

Abba Anderson, LAc, MSOM. of Springfield, Miss. rallied to offer acupuncture care. She contacted Acupuncturists Without Borders (AWB) who responded by sending AWB Managing Director Melanie Rubin to train volunteers. In addition to over 20 licensed acupuncturists from nearby areas offering assistance, Acupuncture Detox Specialists (ADS) helped to increase capacity. The administrative offices of the National Acupuncture Detoxification Association (NADA), located in Columbia, Miss., also played a supportive role in galvanizing the community's response. Anderson stated that the contribution of the ADS "... was critical to the effort, and not adjunct in any way."

A major challenge encountered by the acupuncture group was finding a venue in which to provide treatment. The Salvation Army offered space in their tent to the acupuncturists, and this worked well because it was a high visibility site that attracted survivors, rescue personnel and other community members. Efforts of the acupuncture team were broadcast on the local ABC television network, Channel 12. By sending daily email updates to volunteers, supporters, state officials, and other health colleagues, the level of energy was sustained and magnified.

Andersen commented that it was "... inspirational to see what acupuncture can do that no other form of intervention can accomplish." Over 1,500 treatments have been provided to date. Relating comments made by community members who received treatment, Anderson described the experience of a volunteer who came to clear debris, but was traumatized by discovering bodies and body parts. The volunteer confided to her that, following the acupuncture session, he was able to sleep for the first time since the tornado. Another survivor who was able to receive daily treatment told her that he was able to better control symptoms related to addiction, and to decrease the amount of medication he needed to manage cravings.

North Minneapolis

On May 22, a tornado also devastated a metropolitan neighborhood in North Minneapolis, Minn., killing one person, injuring dozens, and leaving more than 200 homes damaged or destroyed, and 400-500 people without shelter. In order to set up an AWB-supported, NADA-protocol acupuncture clinic to respond to this disaster, Candyce Clayton PhD, MSOM, LAc, put out a call Minnesota-wide to AWB-trained acupuncturists, other licensed acupuncturists, and acupuncture students, asking for clinic volunteers at all levels.

Dr. Clayton describes organizational procedures as follows: "We went to the two acupuncture/Chinese medicine schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul and received donations of needles and other acupuncture supplies. Approximately 50 people responded within 24 hours to our call for clinic staffing. Although securing clinic space was challenging, the Center for Families (under the auspices of the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches) made space available that was located a few blocks from where the tornado had touched down. Training sessions were held at the American Academy of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine in Roseville, Minn. and the College of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine at Northwestern Health Sciences University in Bloomington, Minn."

Acupuncturists provided information about the service on a post-tornado recovery website, promoted their work through the local jazz station, and posted clinic information on a site for local neighborhood residents. A local television station interviewed volunteers for evening news broadcasts.

Clayton's vision for the future includes: "getting our AWB-trained group accepted into the emergency response network of Minneapolis, St. Paul and state-wide, so that future efforts will recognize our legitimacy and the significant assistance we can provide in a trauma situation, and that we will be

included when response units are being set up. We want it recognized that we are licensed, insured, certified, and credentialed, and that trauma survivors and responders benefit from our work."

Western Massachusetts

On June 1, a tornado leveled a number of communities in the Springfield area, resulting in four deaths, property destruction, and hundreds of people needing shelter. This diverse community is home to immigrants from Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, and Somalia as well as to generations of Massachusetts residents.

Treatments have been provided at sites offered by the Salvation Army and the Disaster Assistance Center. Efforts here were coordinated by Karen R. Adams, LAc, a local acupuncturist from Greenfield who also volunteered with AWB in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina.

In describing the team's work, Adams stated that acupuncturists are "largely working with the Five Needle Technique, or NADA protocol. It's a super protocol, and has some surprising effects. Amazing how relaxation can ease a sore shoulder!" Over 60 treatments have been administered by late June.

Although not an acupuncturist, Nancy Petersen, a community resident who wanted to lend her time and energy to relief efforts, became a critical part of the acupuncture relief efforts. Adams states: "It's been hugely helpful to have a local volunteer who is very well organized, committed to her community and has the time to travel around to the various sites This leaves me free to get volunteers and schedule them."

Overview

One common issue raised by each of the acupuncturists organizing relief efforts is the gratitude that they have for AWB's trainings and support. These provided a blueprint for mobilizing and coordinating volunteer acupuncturists and treatment planning. AWB's Executive Director and Founder Diana Fried, MAc, LAc commented on the experiences of these 3 different disasters. She told us that "Volunteers in each location were ready to go and prepared to respond. Having personnel trained and on the ground is critical" to successful efforts.

For the future, developing "connections with other first responders and relief organizations" will be important, as well as supporting legislative guidelines that allow for the use of licensed/credentialed responders. She encourages data collection that documents utilization, outcomes and safety of acupuncture.

Fried describes acupuncture as a "medicine of peace" that "helps those who have experienced trauma begin to recover the fragmented parts of their bodies, minds and spirits so they can function again." We share her vision about the fundamental importance and value of this medicine and salute the volunteers around the country who have contributed so much to global healing.

Acknowledgements to local volunteers:

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Springfield MA:

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