

Case Discussion: Developing a Disaster Management Policy for a Rural Practice

Competency Outcomes:

1. Communication and Consultation Skills:

- Demonstrates clear communication and effective collaboration with team members and stakeholders.
- Discusses and presents ideas in a structured, comprehensive manner.

2. Clinical Management and Therapeutic Reasoning:

- Outlines a clear and actionable approach to developing a disaster management policy.
- Considers practical aspects and constraints in a rural setting.

3. Organizational and Systems-Based Practice:

- Shows understanding of clinic and community dynamics.
- Integrates principles of disaster preparedness and response into clinic policies.

4. Leadership and Advocacy:

- Demonstrates leadership in initiating a disaster management policy.
- Advocates for staff and community safety and continuity of care.

Instructions to the Candidate:

- You are tasked with outlining your approach to developing a comprehensive disaster management policy and plan for a rural clinic that recently experienced a near-miss natural disaster (cyclone).
- Present your approach, emphasizing initial steps, stakeholder involvement, key elements of the policy, and strategies for sustainability and improvement.
- The examiner will guide the discussion with questions.
- You have **15 minutes** for this case discussion.

Scenario:

You are a general practitioner at a rural clinic in Northern Australia. Recently, the clinic experienced a 'near miss' from a cyclone, causing minor damage and highlighting the

lack of disaster preparedness. The practice manager has asked for your assistance in developing a disaster management policy to ensure the clinic and its staff are better prepared for future events. The clinic serves a large rural community that relies heavily on its services, and the nearest major hospital is several hours away.

The clinic manager and staff have expressed concerns about how to maintain patient care, communicate effectively during a crisis, and manage resources such as medications and power supply. Your task is to outline an approach that addresses these challenges and ensures safety and continuity of care for both staff and patients.

Examiner Information:

Prompts and Suggested Answers:

1. Initial Steps in Policy Development

- **Prompt:** What would be your initial steps in developing this disaster management policy?
- **Suggested Answer:** I would start by conducting a **comprehensive risk assessment** to identify which types of natural disasters are most relevant (e.g., cyclones, floods). This would involve reviewing past incidents and consulting with local emergency services. I would engage with **key stakeholders** such as clinic staff, local emergency responders, and community leaders to understand current capabilities and potential areas for improvement. An audit of the clinic's current resources, including medical supplies, communication tools, and backup power systems, would be essential to gauge preparedness levels.

2. Key Components of the Policy

- **Prompt:** What are the essential elements that should be included in this policy?
- **Suggested Answer:** The policy should include:
 - **Emergency Response Protocols:** Clear steps for staff to take during a disaster, such as patient evacuation, securing medical equipment, and assigning roles (e.g., emergency lead, communication officer).
 - **Continuity of Care:** Procedures to maintain essential medical services, such as securing access to chronic medications and emergency care for high-risk patients.

- **Communication Plan:** Internal communication for staff (e.g., group messaging platforms, satellite phones) and external communication for patients and the community (e.g., radio announcements, social media).
- **Resource Management:** Strategies to maintain adequate supplies of medications, water, and fuel for generators.
- **Partnerships and Support Networks:** Details of collaboration with nearby clinics, hospitals, and local authorities for resource sharing and backup support.

3. Staff Training and Preparedness

- **Prompt:** How would you ensure that clinic staff are prepared for future disasters?
- **Suggested Answer:** I would implement **regular training sessions** and **simulation drills** to practice emergency response protocols. These exercises would help identify gaps and build staff confidence in their roles. Cross-training staff for multiple responsibilities ensures flexibility during a crisis. Additionally, all staff should be up to date with **first aid and basic life support training**.

4. Involving the Community and External Partners

- **Prompt:** How would you involve the community and local partners in the disaster management plan?
- **Suggested Answer:** Engaging the **community and local partners** would involve holding informational sessions to educate residents on how to prepare for disasters and how the clinic will function during a crisis. Building partnerships with local government, NGOs, and emergency services ensures a coordinated response and resource sharing. Recruiting and training **volunteers** from the community could provide additional support during a disaster.

5. Continuous Review and Improvement

- **Prompt:** What measures would you take to keep the policy effective and up to date?
- **Suggested Answer:** I would establish a routine **review schedule**, such as annually or following any disaster or drill, to assess the policy's effectiveness. **Feedback mechanisms** from staff and patients post-event would inform updates. Ensuring that lessons learned from each incident are incorporated into the policy will keep it relevant and robust.

6. Addressing Potential Barriers

- **Prompt:** What challenges might you face in developing and implementing this policy, and how would you address them?
- **Suggested Answer:** Challenges could include **limited funding** for resources such as backup generators or additional training. To address this, I would explore **grants** and **funding opportunities** from local government and NGOs. Another barrier could be **staff resistance** to new protocols; this can be mitigated by involving staff early in the development process and highlighting the importance of their safety and the continuity of patient care.

Examination Checklist:

- **Initial Assessment and Stakeholder Engagement:** Did the candidate outline a structured initial approach involving risk assessment and stakeholder input?
- **Core Policy Components:** Did the candidate include key elements such as response protocols, continuity of care, and resource management?
- **Training and Preparedness:** Was staff training, including drills and cross-training, addressed?
- **Community and Partnerships:** Did the candidate mention community involvement and external partnerships?
- **Review and Adaptability:** Was there a plan for ongoing review and updating of the policy?
- **Addressing Barriers:** Did the candidate acknowledge potential challenges and propose solutions?

This case discussion assesses the candidate's strategic approach to developing a disaster management policy for a rural practice, focusing on clear communication, stakeholder involvement, and practical steps for implementation and review.