

APHA 2014

Challenges in Developing a Disaster Worker Mental Health Resiliency Training Program

The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences Worker Training Program (WTP) formed a partnership with Substance Abuse and Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to develop curricula to address the mental health training deficiencies following the Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster in the Gulf. Mental health effects in disaster workers related to traumatic exposures during response and recovery work have included acute stress, chronic stress, anxiety, depression, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Although mental health programs have been established in most disaster zones for community members, programs specifically targeting disaster workers have largely not been developed.

The goal of the program is to improve mental health outcomes for participating disaster workers as well as improvement in co-worker and organizational support systems

There were a number of challenges to developing the "Disaster Worker Resilience Training Program:

- 1) Overcoming workers resistance to viewing mental health as an important health and safety concern,
- 2) Developing training materials that put complex mental health concepts and terminology into plain language,
- 3) Balancing the needs to teach self-care and stress management with information on employer / organizational interventions that largely don't exist at this point in time.

Questions:

1. Is there a need and interest for resiliency programs that address work related stress and trauma in the populations you work with?
2. What are the obstacles to developing these programs?
3. Could the NIEHS program be used or adapted with your constituency?
4. What other approaches to address traumatic stress should be considered?

Session Presenter:

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