

From the Chair - Andy Altom

I want to begin my first "From The Chair" article by recognizing the work of our past Chair Max Snowden. Max has been an excellent board Chair and continues as a solid board member who contributes selflessly in making sure the Arkansas Crisis Response Team is always putting its best foot forward.

Again, on behalf of a wonderful group of members, thank you Max for providing the leadership to set the course for this worthy organization.

We as members have a full plate of work ahead of us. AR-CRT is hosting the NOVA Biannual conference in Little Rock which will keep us "hopping" as the conference dates

near. This year the conference plenaries and workshops will offer: the latest on terrorism, WMD, Incident Command, understanding earthquake response, flu pandemic, "lessons learned" from the 2004 and 2005 hurricanes and tornadoes and "care for caregivers". With the number of call out requests received, I think any additional training on "care for the caregivers" would serve our membership well.

With the creation of the Emotional and Spiritual Care Committee and Debrief Subcommittee, I'm confident that AR-CRT can provide the level of emotional support needed by its membership in the critical time period fol-

lowing a response. Many of us are guilty of short-changing the debriefing process. It is important that AR-CRT takes care of the people caught up in a crisis, but also to make sure that those providing the care are taken care of emotionally.

This year will be a busy and I look forward to working with you.

*NOVA Basic CRT, 1998
NOVA Advanced, 1999
Certified Crisis Responder, 2002*



*Andy Altom, CEO
Methodist Family
Health*

Stress Management - Caring for Ourselves

A lecturer, when explaining stress management to an audience, raised a glass of water and asked, How heavy is this glass of water?

Answers called out ranged from 20g to 500g (.7 oz to 17.7 oz, English equivalents.)

The lecturer replied, "The absolute weight doesn't matter. It depends on how long you try to hold it.

If I hold it for a minute, that's not a problem.

If I hold it for an hour, I'll have an ache in my right arm.

If I hold it for a day, you'll have to call an ambulance.

In each case, it's the same weight, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it becomes."

The lecturer continued, "And that's the way it is with stress management. If we carry our burdens all the time, sooner or later, as the burden becomes increasingly heavy, we won't

be able to carry on."
"As with the glass of water, you have to put it down for a while and rest before holding it again. When we're refreshed, we can carry on with the burden. So, before you return home tonight, put the burden of work down."

Don't carry it home. You can pick it up tomorrow. Whatever burdens you're carrying now, let them down for a moment if you can."

"What you suppress emotionally, you will express physically."

*Dr. Lori Christensen
Integrated Health and Wellness
Center - Neptune, New Jersey*

So, my friend, why not take a while to just simply RELAX. Put down anything that may be a burden to you right now. Don't pick it up again until

after you've rested a while. Life is short. Enjoy it!

Responding to a crisis is not just a "sideline" for many of us, but is a part of what we do in our respective professions. In fact, many people are so "good" at attending to others in a crisis, they lose sight of the energy required to deal with the "burdens" of others. Our sense of compassion, which serves us so well as a responder, can also serve as a negative factor for our own spirits, especially following repeated responses.

Dr. Frank M. Ochberg, in his paper "When Helping Hurts," explains the double-edged aspect of sensitivity:

"We are good outreach workers, therapists, advocates, reporters, because we are sensitive. And, because we are sensitive, we pay a price, sooner or later."

*Submitted by Karen Lowery, Co-Chair
Debrief Subcommittee - Emotional and
Spiritual Care Committee*

Insights from Karen Lowery on Debrief

Dealing with crisis after crisis, like holding the glass of water which grows heavy over time, may be more of a burden than we are willing to recognize. Participating in a team debrief following a response gives team members a time and place to talk about their shared experiences and an opportunity to put the call-out in the past.

Individual and team growth is a common byproduct, and each person has a moment in time to reflect upon what he will take with him from the call-out. In addition to offering immediate relief from concerns on the call-out, valuable information is exchanged which can be used in future crisis response work. Rarely do team members report the debrief experience as a negative one.

Coralie Maxwell, Episcopal Church CRT leader, AR-CRT Board Secretary and Emotional and Spiritual Care Co-Chair, describes the link between the response and the debrief as an example of community: "What always comes to mind for me in both the response and the debrief is that we are called to bear one another's burdens. That's why this is a ministry to me. I bear someone else's burdens in the call-out and someone bears mine in the debrief. Isn't that what community is all about?"

AR-CRT Board Member and Emotional and Spiritual Care Co-Chair, the Msgr. Jack Harris explained, "My experience with team debriefings has always been positive. There is strength in numbers and the NOVA approach of debriefing the team together is affirming for most. It not only serves as a time for the team to be together again, but to share how they remember what happened and what has happened to them since separating."

Psychologist Geoffrey D. White, Ph.D., points to the potential for secondary traumatic stress (compassion fatigue) among caregivers who work directly with victims and survivors of catastrophic events. He states that caregiv-

ers regard themselves as "there for the victims," and tend not to admit to their own distress. He further recommends that leaders become aware of this potential and address compassion fatigue issues. Team coordinators and leaders can mandate participation in a debrief as a condition of serving on a call-out.

Msgr. Harris asserts that compassion fatigue signs can surface suddenly. "A person may respond to many callouts for a number of years without any negative effects and then a particular incident might kick up a past unresolved conflict with no warning," he says.

Experienced responders can become weary from the cumulative effect of working with those impacted by crisis. Linda Graham, Craighead County CRT leader, AR-CRT Board member and Training Subcommittee Co-Chair, is a certified NOVA trainer and has participated in numerous local, state, and national call-outs, and understands the importance of participating in a debrief. "Debrief can, of course, help both the seasoned crisis responder and the rookie. Every debrief session I have participated in has called up some anecdote or memory that I had repressed or overlooked during my introspective periods. For all of us -- debriefing sessions are once again time to reflect and reaffirm."



*Karen Lowery,
Home School
Counselor
Fuller Middle
School
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Special School
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From my own experience, I am discovering that when I help others, I postpone my own reaction. This works really well for me in being "present" for others, but it does not eliminate stress for me... it merely delays it! Over time, I have also experienced the physical aspects of unaddressed stress. Consequently, these lessons in humility have been rich, yet have come at a dear price.

As you prepare for the next call-out, I encourage you to examine your conscience and explore ways to take care of yourself. Dr. Jeffrey T. Mitchell, founder of the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, recommends spending time with loved ones and investing in personal relationships as sound self-care practices for responders. "Read, think, pray, play. Do anything that works for you," Dr. Mitchell writes. Look for ways to renew your spirit. Use what works for you. [*Review Chapter 18 in the NOVA Community Crisis Response Team Training Manual*]

Be aware of your own reactions. Learn to take your own "emotional" temperature or identify a trusted colleague, friend, or loved one who will do so for you. Offer to provide this assistance to others who walk this path.

And don't forget to recognize when to put the "glass of water down" and rest before holding it again. When you're refreshed, you are in a better position to carry on with the burdens that crop up along the way, whether they belong to you, your loved ones, or those you serve.

*Submitted by Karen Lowery, Co-Chair
AR-CRT Debrief Subcommittee*

*AR-CRT Board of Directors
Pulaski County CRT
ArSCA CRT*

*NOVA Basic CRT, 1998
NOVA Advanced, 1999
Certified Crisis Responder, 2002*

"What affects the mind affects the body, and what affects the body affects the mind. The two are inextricably intertwined and cannot be separated."

*"Current Best Practices: Coping with Major Critical Incidents."
FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin
(Sept. 2004)*