



# Texas Board of Nursing Bulletin

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If there is one thing Texas is known for, it is large scale disasters. We have floods, tornadoes, wildfires, and hurricanes that rival any in the country. The way Texas prepares and responds also rivals any other state in the country. Texas has a very responsive system and nurses need to know how that system works and their role in response. As part of this response system, Texas has a State Medical Operations Center that is the responsibility of the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) and assists in acquiring and deploying medical resources in response to requests for assistance.

The public expects healthcare professionals, nurses in particular, to know what to do and that nurses will make the right decisions to keep individuals, families, and communities safe during a disaster. This expectation of public protection carries the responsibility for nurses to uphold the standards of nursing practice. Nurses should be prepared, know how to respond, and know what to expect. Nurses have a civic responsibility and a duty to respond to relieve pain and suffering.

To meet this responsibility, three things have to happen:

1. **Be prepared;**
2. **Know the facility plan, including the nurse's role in that plan; and**
3. **Know what to expect and how to respond.**

Being prepared means having a plan that addresses how the nurse should respond and how the nurse's family is cared for in the nurse's absence. The nurse should develop a plan that works for his/her family and practice it. Each family member should

know what to do, where to go, and who to call. Resources for developing a personal preparedness plan are available on the DSHS website at: <https://texasprepares.org/>. The nurse needs to be prepared to depart quickly. It is recommended that at least one week's supply of food be kept. Additionally, the nurse should have a backpack already packed with essentials to last up to a week that can be accessed immediately. The nurse should be very familiar with the route along with alternate routes to the reporting area.

Responding during a disaster will not be business as usual. Nurses need to be prepared to work with limited resources and make decisions on how best to use them to maximize benefits for patients. Nurses may be in an alternate care facility because the primary facility has been damaged and is not functional. Nurses may be working with limited power, no water, no waste disposal system, and limited communications capability. Staffing may be limited for a period of time due to the impact of the disaster and the response time of those coming to help. Local emergency management will be working to provide essentials for responders to carry out their responsibilities.



Nurses who want to help need to know what is needed, where it is needed, and for how long. Just showing up without a clear plan can create confusion and complicate the disaster response. Nurses can contribute to an effective response by registering ahead of time on the Texas Disaster Volunteer Registry (<https://texasdisastervolunteerregistry.org/>). The Texas Disaster Volunteer Registry allows volunteers to be pre-credentialed so that volunteer alerts, activations, and deployments can be coordinated. Once registered, nurses should watch for notices that help is needed, where and what type, and how to reply to the request. Nurses should notify their facility if they are willing to help and/or willing to back fill staffing within the facility when others have been deployed. Nurses responding from another state who do not hold a Texas license or a compact privilege to practice in Tex-

as should learn the process that the Texas Board of Nursing (Board) has established to expedite the license verification process related to working in Texas in a disaster. The Board will post alerts related to licensure verification on its home page at: [www.bon.texas.gov](http://www.bon.texas.gov).

Nurses are an integral component of a successful disaster response. First, nurses need to be prepared and ready. Second, nurses need to know their responsibility to their facility and what their role is. Resources will be limited. Third, nurses should know what to expect including: how to find out if nurses are needed, what areas of specialty are needed, where and for how long assistance is needed, and how to reply to requests for help. That way, nurses who are called to respond will be of great assistance to the community they will be serving. Nurses are called to respond and have a civic duty to do so. Nurses have the specialized knowledge, skills, and abilities to relieve pain and suffering during a disaster. That is why nurses are such a valuable resource in times of disaster.

*Mr. Hilliard has an avid interest in nursing disaster preparedness and represents the Texas Nurses Association on the Texas Preparedness Coordinating Council with the Department of State Health Services.*

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