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Examining disaster preparedness of hospitals in Matara district, Sri Lanka

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Natural and anthropogenic disasters are increasing globally and affecting many people. As hospitals are essential infrastructures in responding to disasters, they are expected to remain functional during and in the immediate aftermath of disasters. Sri Lanka, a small island nation, has experienced several natural disasters such as tsunami of 2004, exposing inadequate disaster preparedness in many local hospitals. However, very limited research has been conducted in Sri Lanka about disaster safe hospitals. This study examines the safe hospital concept in the world and in Sri Lanka to identify the gaps in local hospital preparedness. When tsunami of 2004 affected Sri Lanka, Matara was one of the devastated areas of the country and it remains vulnerable to natural disasters. The methodology adopted in this study was extensive reviews of literatures concerning safe hospital preparedness and field visit experience to five hospitals in Matara district, Sri Lanka. The result shows challenging areas in hospital preparedness. Lack of awareness, expertise and funding are some of the drawbacks identified in improving hospital safety. Most of the aspects of preparedness were found to be inadequate such as human recourse, communication, safety, security, transportation, critical supplies and psychosocial support. Health authorities should pay much attention towards capacity building of health personnel and hospitals in Sri Lanka.

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