

Seismic Crisis in Azores 2022: The Contribution of Primary Care in Disaster

André Oliveira Rodrigues* & Tiago Miranda Soares da Costa Dias

Health Unit of São Miguel Island, Ponta Delgada, Portugal

***Corresponding author:** André Oliveira Rodrigues, Health Unit of São Miguel Island, Ponta Delgada, Portugal.

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Abstract

During the 2022 seismic crisis on São Jorge Island in the Azores, disaster response teams were created to strengthen healthcare services and prepare for a rapid response to a potential catastrophic event. Healthcare professionals from other islands supported local services by organizing medical supplies, adapting emergency resources, developing evacuation plans, and providing training. This initiative highlighted the importance of family physicians in disaster response in isolated settings, as well as existing gaps in coordination and preparedness, reinforcing the need for better planning and increased training in emergency and disaster management.

Keywords: Emergency Preparedness, Island Healthcare, Disaster Response, Public Health Emergencies, Azores.

Introduction

In 2022, a seismic crisis began on São Jorge Island in the Azores archipelago, and a contingency disaster plan was activated, in which, disaster response teams were formed to reinforce the presence of healthcare professionals. We, general and family medicine residents, volunteered to support local health services

and the local population, while also seeking to acquire knowledge in the field of disaster and emergency management, share experiences with other professionals, understand the role of the family physician during a disaster, and observe the reality of healthcare delivery on an island without a hospital.



Figure 1: Map of São Jorge Island showing the epicenters of seismic activity in March 2022.

Source: Seismic and Volcanic Monitoring and Information Centre of the Azores (CIVISA)

Objectives and Activities

The objectives were to deliver medical supplies, prepare, and execute a rapid response in case of a catastrophic event. Volunteers aimed to support local healthcare providers, acquire knowledge in disaster and emergency management, share experiences with colleagues, understand the role of family physicians during a disaster, and observe healthcare delivery on an island without a hospital.

A disaster plan was developed for both an orderly evacuation and a disorderly evacuation. The teams worked at one of the health centers on the island, which served as the main hub for healthcare resources. Tasks included inventorying medical supplies, adjust emergency vehicles according to current guidelines, and creating emergency algorithms. Additionally, training sessions were conducted for local healthcare professionals.

Discussion

This response initiative, coordinated by the local health, military and emergency agencies, provided insight into the disaster plans and the role of healthcare professionals. It highlighted the necessity for family physicians, especially in isolated areas with limited resources, to be well-versed in disaster and emergency

response. The experience revealed gaps in coordination, transparency, and the need for better-planned and organized disaster strategies, as well as increased training for healthcare staff. This initiative contributed to the acquisition of emergency and disaster management knowledge, offering opportunities for learning and collaboration.



Figure 2: Response teams operating at the health center on São Jorge Island.
Original images. Authorized use.

Conclusion

The seismic crisis on São Jorge Island highlighted the vital role of healthcare professionals, especially family physicians, in disaster response and management, particularly in isolated settings with limited resources.

The initiative not only reinforced local healthcare capacity but also exposed critical gaps in preparedness, emphasizing the need for improved coordination, planning and training. Ultimately, it served as a valuable opportunity for professional growth, knowledge exchange, and enhanced resilience in the face of future emergencies.