

Integrative Healers Action Network: A Working Model for Disaster Relief

By Myra Nissen, CCH, RSHom(NA), with Jenny Harrow, MA and Kathleen Scheible, CCH

October 2017 was a bad time for fires in northern California. Fourteen large wildfires, along with many minor fires, simultaneously broke out during that month throughout eight counties in Northern California, including Napa, Lake, Sonoma, Mendocino, and Butte counties in what was called the Northern California Firestorm. Due to the extreme conditions, shortly after the fires ignited, they rapidly grew to become massive conflagrations spanning from 1,000 to well over 20,000 acres within a single day. In addition, the fires have destroyed more than 8,900 structures and killed at least 44 people. The fires burned over 245,000 acres of land, forcing over 20,000 people to evacuate. They were the costliest group of wildfires on record, causing around \$14.5 billion in damages, including \$11 billion in insured losses and \$1.5 billion in fire suppression costs.

Tubbs, considered the worst fire in 2017, devastated 36,807 acres in Napa and Sonoma Counties, 5,636 structures, and was the cause of 22 deaths.

I live in SW Solano County just seven miles from the Atlas fire in Napa County that consumed 51,057 acres. I was surrounded by smoke and the constant whirr of air purifiers. I wore N95 masks and had to take *Arsenicum* to breathe well. My partner and neighbors were involved with the fires in Sonoma. My partner works for the City of Santa Rosa. One set of neighbors work for the Forest Service in fire management and did a lot of work with Cal Fire. Another neighbor worked in public relations for a major hospital in Santa Rosa

that had to be evacuated. Her job was not only to report accurate information to the media but also to sort out how to reach doctors, staff and family members who were displaced by the fires, working even though their homes were lost. All these efforts were going on around me, but I could not figure out how to contribute. I offered free consultations, but no one took me up on the offer.

Fortunately, a group of integrative healers in Sonoma emerged during the 2017 fires. As the fires neared the neighborhood,

Jenny Harrow, MA and Jen Riegle, ND, colleagues at the Santa Rosa-based clinic, Flourish Integrative Health, began organizing at the grassroots level by working to bring together practitioners to small clinics and getting the word out through social media. “I have a Masters’ Degree in Integrative Health Studies from the California Institute of Inte-

gral Studies and am certified as an Integrative Health & Wellness Coach. I have a deep understanding and appreciation of integrative medicine and am good at organizing and networking,” Jenny said.

Jenny and Jen approached the Red Cross shelter at the Santa Rosa Fairgrounds, the largest shelter for evacuees in the county. The regional Red Cross Chapter was familiar with the benefits that natural healing could bring and allowed the practitioners in. When the National Red Cross showed up, they were skeptical at first about the group of integrative practitioners, but they were allowed to stay since exit polls of

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evacuees showed positive benefits from the CAM care they received. Additionally, they worked with other practitioners in the community by offering to firefighters and The National Guard various integrative disciplines, such as essential oils, massage, and chiropractic. It is here that the Integrative Healers Action Network (IHAN) was born. After the Tubbs Fire, Jenny and Jen worked with community recovery groups in Sonoma County and collaborated with organizations such as Acupuncturists Without Borders to organize practitioners during the subsequent Ventura County fires that began in December 2017. IHAN gained non-profit status in December 2018 and began the process of creating a memorandum of understanding with the Red Cross.

The mission of IHAN is to provide backbone support to safely and effectively coordinate and deploy licensed and certified practitioners of complementary and alternative modalities (CAM) to provide acute and long-term care to communities impacted by emergency situations through systems that bridge therapies and organizations. IHAN is now a community partner of the American Red Cross and organizes Integrative Health Clinics inside Red Cross shelters.

Jenny goes on to explain, “It is difficult for local practitioners to establish community clinics and organize effective disaster relief efforts on their own because often they are in survival mode themselves. Even if there are successful efforts, it is difficult to reach the masses because during these community-wide acute trauma situations, most people have tunnel vision as they are in survival mode. Having a location at the shelter offers a one-stop shop where you can reach many people who are displaced by the fires and are in need of support. Additionally, the shelters often house the most under-served members of our community, so this provides practitioners an opportunity to work with populations that often do not have access to CAM modalities.”

Looking back, survival mode is exactly where I was during the Atlas fire. I had little infrastructure for support. I was trying to keep my home and my lungs from being inundated with smoke while taking care of my clients who were in the same situation. I had friends and neighbors poised to evacuate. Sorting out a pop-up clinic was an extra burden that I hadn't expected.

Where were the homeopaths?

Kathleen Scheible, president of the California Homeopathic Medical Society and several other Bay Area homeopaths were making inquiries but were unsuccessful. At that point the Red Cross was only allowing practitioners with medical licenses and medical liability insurance. IHAN was just starting out and occupied with their own efforts.

Here comes 2018 fire season

The conversation began again during the 2018 fire season. Kathleen was able to demonstrate the qualifications for certified homeopaths through the Council of Homeopathic Certification. There are minimum standards, a uniform certification process that is nationally recognized, and homeopaths have professional liability insurance. That and a background check was sufficient, and homeopaths are allowed to participate in IHAN clinics.

Still reeling from the 2018 fires, the Camp Fire swept Butte County during November 2018. The Camp Fire became the most destructive wildfire in California history to date and the sixth-deadliest wildfire overall. It covered an area of 153,336 acres (almost 240 square miles), and destroyed 18,804 structures, causing at

least 85 fatalities. The fire destroyed the town of Paradise and put a lot of stress on the surrounding communities trying to cope with the influx of the evacuees. Chico was especially affected.

How it worked

IHAN negotiated a five-day Holiday Integrative Health Clinic for Camp Fire evacuees and Red Cross staff and volunteers at the shelter in Chico at the Silver Dollar Fair Grounds. I was one of five homeopaths present during the clinic, along with Wanda Smith-Schick, CCH, President, Homeopathic Institute of the Pacific, Cristina Garelli, CCH, RSHom(NA), Clinical Director, Homeopathic Institute of the Pacific, Kathleen Scheible, CCH, and Mary Johnston, CCH.

We were there with acupuncturists, a massage therapist, and a naturopath. The clinic was located at the back end of the women's dorm behind the medical clinic. It was a small area, but there were makeshift dividers, and tables and chairs.

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It was clear that we had to be flexible and be able to adapt to the needs of the community at a moment's notice. By the third day we had a system, with a central table where people could sign in. There were also natural remedies that we could hand out. It became apparent that each person benefitted from experiencing several types of treatment rather than one.

The clinic was scheduled five weeks after the fire was contained, so much time had passed. Most of the people who had remained at the clinic were not in the same condition as those in Santa Rosa in who were the acute stages of trauma. We were seeing the under-served and at risk. When working at the acute level of trauma it is a matter of getting people back into their bodies so they can move on. The challenge was different with most of the population in Chico. Many were already suffering traumas and had no time to recover before the trauma of the Camp Fire was layered on top. We were seeing more chronic remedy pictures.

Remedies were donated by Boiron, Hahnemann Labs, and Ohm Pharma. Flower essences were donated by Flower Essence Services.

The clinic has closed, but the need for this kind of work will be there for many years to come as people struggle to get back to some semblance of normalcy.

IHAN as a model

Kathleen feels that the State of California has the opportunity for collaboration among integrative healers and traditional medical circles. Demand for alternative therapies is at a critical mass. As integrative therapies become absorbed into medical circles, the true spirit for the CAM modalities should come from the experts. The experts should be the ones who bring care to other populations.

IHAN is an excellent model for partnership with the medical model. It has the expertise that other organizations lack to build a group of qualified CAM practitioners in a traditional medical setting. Organizations such as the Red Cross don't have the time or background to understand integrative disciplines or to screen them.

Kathleen and Jenny would both like to see IHAN grow to serve nationally. I would like to see IHAN become involved at the ground level with organizations such as the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) through FEMA. The CERT program educates volunteers about disaster preparedness for the hazards that may impact their local area and trains them in basic disaster response skills, such as fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical

operations. What a wonderful way for local practitioners to integrate training in the basic uses of natural remedies such as essential oils, flower essences and homeopathy, and to build first aid kits accordingly.

If you would like to register as a practitioner volunteer for IHAN please visit www.integrativehealersactionnetwork.org/.

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Myra Nissen, CCH, RSHom(NA), attended the Pacific Academy of Homeopathy in San Francisco. She currently has practices in Walnut Creek and Davis, CA and serves on the board of the North American Society of Homeopaths. Myra's practice includes homeopathy, metabolic balance and ALCAT Cell Sciences. She is a chapter leader for the Weston A. Price Foundation Contra Costa Tri-Valley Chapter. Her website is www.myranissen.com.

Jenny Harrow, MA, is the co-founder and co-executive director of IHAN. Additionally, she facilitates several mindfulness-based nature therapy walks through her practice EcoWisdom and is the operations manager at both Flourish Integrative Health and Ecology of Awakening. Jenny has a Masters' Degree in Integrative Health Studies from the California Institute of Integral Studies and is certified as an integrative health coach, guided imagery practitioner, and nature therapy guide.

Kathleen Scheible, CCH, attended the Pacific Academy of Homeopathy in San Francisco. She is currently president of the California Homeopathic Medical Society, founder of Bay Area Homeopathy Association. Kathleen resides in San Francisco where she has a family practice and a free clinic at a local senior center. Her website is www.bernalhomeopathy.com.