

How to Create an Effective Naturopathic Emergency Clinic for Areas Struck by a Natural Catastrophe

by Julia Graves



I am writing this paper based on my experience as a healer in half a year of research on native healers and midwives in remote rural Zimbabwe, a peace pilgrimage into the Sarajevo war zone during the Yugoslavia war, as the doctor for monks at a Tibetan Buddhist monastery in India, and from setting up and running the Naturopathic Haiti Earthquake Victim Relief Clinic. Having had only one week to conceptualize, fundraise, and set up the Haiti clinic in response to the earthquake, a friend pointed out to me that I might have created a model for similar emergency situations. While each catastrophe area might call for adjustments, the model would work well for most cases.

Julia Graves in Haiti

The Haiti Clinic took place two times so far (fall of 2010), the first time with three foreign and one local healer, the second with six foreign and two local healers. It served up to 250 poor people in ghetto areas or tent camps per day. The involvement and initiative of the participating Haitian-American healers and locals was as crucial as the skills and fundraising done by the foreigners.

How to Start - Fundraising

The clinic starts by you hearing about the catastrophe and deciding to go there to help. Since you are a private person with limited funds, the first question is how to fundraise. In the case of the Haiti clinic, a Haitian herbalist friend of mine needed to go to take care of his effected elderly father, and he said he wanted to offer help at the same time. So I composed a compelling letter to all of our friends, based on the first hand accounts we had from Jinpa's family and friends. The response was immediate and surprising: people really do wish to help. I also wrote direct letters to people asking for certain things, such as to a friend asking his mother who lives next to an essential oil distillery in France could she send some essential oils, or companies would they donate. Private people were very generous in donating whatever they had ("please give whatever you have at home and are no longer using" and "we are looking for donations of [list what you need]"). Gifts of tents, suitcases, remedies etc. arrived daily and piled up. To ask for donations in kind from a company, it is best to have someone the company knows and trusts request on your behalf. If you have a lot of healer friends, use your network to find out who knows who. Students of homeopathy can request their professors to ask on their behalf, etc. Or you might get a famous herbalist to give your project a letter of recommendation to send along with your request for a donation. This proved to be very fruitful: we received a lot of donations in kind. If you wish the clinic to be more than a one time gig, it is of prime importance to send a thoughtful report to the benefactors, including an account of what you did with the remedies or other things they gave, and possibly photos and success stories. This ensures their enthuse to donate again should you go out another time or need more. I took a lot of care with this feed back process and received many, many unsolicited offers for more donations in this way. If you have friends who have a non-profit organization endorsed to do international projects, you might want to receive money donations through them.

Attention: Do not use a pay pal account that is not related to such a non-profit to accept money donations, as pay pal will freeze the account indefinitely and kidnap your money until you prove that you are such an organization. While a bank cannot legally freeze an account like that, pay pal, being not a bank and a legally to date not defined entity can. It is not illegal to raise funds or to accept donations as a private person and to put them into your account, but pay pal will freeze the account for reasons they will not disclose and do not need to until you take them to court, and might not even disclose them then.

What is Best to Take

This depends in part on what has happened. So it is essential to talk to someone who is on site. Obviously, an earthquake in Tibet in snowy winter asks for something else than in Gujarat with a lot of burn and fire victims, which is different from Haiti where dust and lack of water and therefore hygiene triggered epidemic disease. However, since you are a small private effort, you can only bring up to three suitcases per person, and you need whatever is small, light, cheap, and effective. The unfortunate news for herbalists is that homeopathy and essential oils fit this requirement much more so that cremes, tinctures, or bulk herbs. (As far as I know, the US is the only country potentially giving trouble to people trying to take dried plant material into the country. The EU and other places do not pose a restriction on *dry* plant material, since the plants are dead.) Flower essences are essential to treat the emotional shock, and if taken along in stock solution and made into dose bottles once there can also be compact to take. Nutritional supplements are about the most space consuming, since so much is needed per person, so it is advisable to find out which tonic plants or foods are available in the stricken country.



For Haiti, this worked out to be:

homeopathics – Arnica etc. for shock, trauma and any kind of injury to the musculo-skeletal system, general fever remedies, remedies for diarrhea, vomiting, flue, malaria, conjunctivitis, and vaginal discharge

essential oils – tea tree and lavender as broad spectrum anti-microbials given that they are anti-bacterial, -viral, and -fungal; pine and thyme for coughs and colds; citronella to repel mosquitoes (for babies sleeping outside) etc.

herbs – wormwood for worms, Spilanthes Usnea tincture for skin affections etc.

flower essences – Rescue Remedy, Post Trauma Stabilizer (FES), remedies for grief and loss etc.

nutritional supplements – moringa leaf powder and pointing people to local moringa trees and other nutritionally rich weeds!

dressing materials – this is only needed if there are open wounds. We arrived in Haiti one month after the quake and treated very few wounds, and mostly no longer earthquake related ones. It was, however, good to have a bit of everything at hand – especially latex gloves, essential oil based hand sanitizers, and tongue depressors next to some bandages and sterile gauze

medicine table in Haiti

What You Do and Do Not Offer

It is useful to be clear as to what you do and do not intend to offer. An emergency relief clinic will usually do not offer dental care, eye glasses, nor treatment for chronic conditions such as diabetes. When people came needing those things, we would simply explain that we were not set up for that, and they understood.

You might also want to decide who you wish to treat. Everyone? Children? The rich or the poor? While our Haiti clinic was open to everyone, we did not give much attention to digestive disorders in rich, opulent people but rather told them to diet, saving the digestive herbs for the destitute. We prioritized giving the few nutritional supplements we had to infants, pregnant woman, and severely malnourished people. Be clear that you cannot be the angelic co-dependent all-wish-fulfilling practitioner as in your home country who takes one hour or more to fix every single complaint. Skip the pimples in a teenager with a back injury.

Who Do You Need to Be?

It is obviously helpful to be very well trained, since you will have to work fast and there is not time to look up things, not to be wimpy and not to faint at the sight of an injury. Being at least part *pitta* constitution is helpful, since you have the inner fire to get things done, and to see all obstacles as a welcome challenge to your sharp thinking and fast problem solving skills. Having spent extended times in third world countries without electricity, running water etc. is also very helpful. All healers at the Haiti clinic were third world country veterans and did not mind dirty hands or toilets, and a lack of hygiene at work.

It is of course useful to know your tropical diseases when in the tropics, STD in an out when in a poor country with lack of hygiene etc. At least try to have someone on staff who can train the others in recognizing malnutrition or whatever it might be you see a lot.

How Do You Stay Safe?

If you are not part of a big organization that operates behind a nato wire fence with machine gunned soldiers around, it is crucial to have a part native crew you trust, who know where it is safe and unsafe for you to be or work. Ultimately, safety is an “inside job”, and whether or not you feel and thus are safe depends on your spiritual attitude.

As for protection from epidemic disease, smudge the local where you are if you can, work outside rather than in confined, unventilated rooms, and spray essential oils. Use tonic herbs, milkthistle to protect from hepatitis, sweet annie to protect from malaria etc.



Working with a Local Crew and Local Healers

I do not think it is possible to set up and successfully run a small, grass root level clinic without a local crew. Having a mixed local / foreign crew has countless advantages: the locals know the language, customs, culture, as well as where it is advisable to go or not to go. They also have their own social network that the clinic can employ to operate – such as a pastor setting up his church for a clinic day, using parishioners as translators, to control the crowd, give out numbers to the people waiting in line and serve food to the clinic crew – and even to have someone well off offer the use of their clean toilet! When the

local people make their own effort to host the clinic, the energy exchange between the rich foreigners who appear and the poor locals is more equal, and the work will be more effective. We paid most of the local crew members at local rates, while all foreigners were volunteers who fundraised that money to pay the local crew. To be able to employ a local herbalist or healer to work with you at the clinic adds many advantages – when you run out of the supply for something, he or she can tell you the local recipe, and you can tell that to the people “for you heart burn, boil *liane molle* in milk and drink in the mornings”. The healer can also help you understand local folk medicinal concepts, which might prove essential to understanding your clients.

The Feedback Process

Another important factor about working with locals is that the poor patients are much more likely to give them feedback than to you. This was obvious to me from working with my Haitian American herbalist friend, who came home with several stories of people walking up to him telling him how incredibly our remedies had been working every day, whereas no one walked up to me: the cultural and language barrier was too high. Since it is important to know whether or not what you are doing is effective, this is very important: this is how we found out that our tea tree and lavender essential oils in vegetable oil locally was very effective for vaginal discharge of all kinds etc.

Translators

I found it of utmost importance to have a good translator. While in Haiti, I quickly understood a lot of the local French Creole since I speak fluent French. However, there was more than a pure language barrier – even if I asked something in perfect Creole, most people would not understand me, because it was unthinkable to them that I *could* be saying something in Creole. So my translator would have to repeat the exact same phrase for them to answer. That was a conceptual language barrier (“white people do not speak

Creole”). I had the same experience when speaking Tibetan to the boy monks at the Indian monasteries – since I spoke kindly to them, they just stared at me with amazement. My translator later explained to me that children are never addressed kindly or politely in Tibetan culture, and they were too shocked about that to respond.



In Haiti, I found that all my male translators would take over the role of the doctor from me within minutes, even if they did not have the slightest clue about medicine and were lousy translators at that. So I learned that in a patriarch society, a woman healer is well advised to have a woman translator who respects her as the boss. Even then, a lot of my first women translators would boss around, scold and push the destitute people and children coming to the clinic – result of a classist system. I kept firing my translators on a daily basis, until I found a kind young woman with good language skills, who translated precisely and loved the children (having in the meantime

learned to explain “We came here to treat the poor, and we are especially please to treat the most destitute of children. We treat everyone with respect, no matter how young and poor. It is not our job to scold anyone here.”). This opened up a whole other heart dimension between me and the patients. Besides those personality traits and translation skills, it is very useful to know the local language in part, because you can learn to catch your translator's mistakes and omissions, and train him or her to translate as you need (“those emotional details are really important to me – don't leave them out” or “I do need to know the details of how it feels to find the right remedy – you have to translate that, too”).

Local Folk Medicinal Concepts

These are of great importance, because they determine what people tell you about their disease, and how. For example, in Haiti, the word used for chest or thorax is “stomach”. So, hundreds of children come and tell you “I have a stomach ache”. If you do not know this particular aspect, you will miss that about half of them have bronchitis, dust lungs or asthma. The remedy to this kind of misunderstanding is the most essential of questions: “Can you please point to where exactly it hurts?” This can save you a lot of differential diagnosis.

Other folk concepts involve terminology picked up from the medical language. One of the most commonly used medical phrase in Haiti is “I have anemia”. However, this self-diagnosis does not cover the same symptoms in the heads of the locals as in ours. They do not mean a lack of red blood cells, nor did they have a blood test done. “I have anemia” in Haiti can mean a symptom complex that ranges from actual anemia via weakness, rubbery nails, dizziness upon getting up, to blurred vision. Larger than what we call anemia, it is more precisely akin to what is called “poor blood” in Appalachia (Phyllis Light), denoting a state of poor nutrition and not enough nutritional substances in the blood. It may include low blood pressure. Misunderstanding some of these concepts can result in death of the patient, such as not recognizing a *naga* or spirit attack in the Himalayas, or misunderstanding “bad blood” in Haiti. The remedy to this is to ask the local healer or people on your team “what do people mean when they say: I have anemia / bad blood?”

Question Protocol

Depending on the situation, you will need a question protocol to work fast and see many people per day. These questions should serve to differentiate between two diseases or two remedies to give. For example, “do you have the fever every day or some days on and some days off?” (possible malaria?) “when you have the fever, do you feel only hot or do you have chills?” If yes for the chills, test the fever with chill remedies.

In Haiti, the most important question was: “since when do you have this symptom?” making sure the answer clarified whether or not the onset was with the earthquake. No matter what the symptom, in that case we

would treat for shock with flower essences, and the host of psychosomatic symptoms such as insomnia, heart palpitations, and breathing difficulties would almost always clear up. If the symptoms could be related to getting hit by debris or inhaling dust, we needed to ask for that.

Since a naturopathic clinic might be the only clinic systematically treating emotional trauma, and since people might not mention that, it needs to be part of the standard question protocol. "What happened to you in the earthquake? Where were you? Did you get injured? What did you see? Did people you know die?" etc. Parents will discount that anything troubling happened to their unborn babies, infants, or young children. Remember that early childhood trauma or trauma in utero are entirely modern and Western concepts.

People will not necessarily be forthcoming in telling you that they are emotionally shocked, grieving, or got injured. It is your responsibility as the healer to ask for that, which sometimes needs a lot of probing. Make sure to train your translator not to sweep this information under the carpet. Expect people to not address trauma, and minimize collective trauma and trauma of children!!! "Nothing happened to this child in the earthquake." (She only had the house collapse onto her, saw people die, lost 13 family members including one parent and is shaking with nightmares since, but absolutely nothing happened to her. That is, she did not die like all the others.) Remember that they might have survivors guilt. "I didn't die, and I did not lose an arm or leg, so I am fine."



How To Treat Many People Fast

The key to dealing with hundreds of people in line every day is again to know your remedies well, to know how to ask to make the difference between the two or three possible remedies, and to know the keynote (that is: particular and specific) symptoms of the remedies. It is very helpful to know constitutional and face diagnosis, since half of your diagnosis is done as the person sits down in the chair. To recognize the shy yet seductive smile of a Pulsatilla girl leaves little doubt about the right remedy if she says she has a green snotty nose or yellow green vaginal discharge. Knowing tongue and pulse

diagnosis is also very valuable, however when things get very busy, there might not be enough time for that. We students of Mathew Wood found that even basic pulse testing for the right remedy was the fastest way to find the right remedy: know the constitutional type of the child as it sits down and you say hello, narrow down the diagnosis and keynote symptoms with three questions which leave you with two to three remedies, pulse test them in the fastest way, which means just feel whether or not they basically regulate the pulse. When things get insane due to a crowd of suffering and screaming people, or because you need to treat 150 people in one hour with three people, then there is only one way of doing it: being sure of what you are doing. I noticed that native healers don't doubt themselves. They do not question their choices nor actions. Their medical intuition informed by their thorough training tells them what to give, and they give it with complete certainty of a perfect cure. Being in the position of having to treat hundreds of people very fast is actually an excellent training in knowing what you are doing, and doing it well.

How to Protect Your Mind

A lot of people asked me "how do you deal with all the suffering?" The answer is simple: you contemplate what good you do and what a difference you make, not all that you cannot do. Just focus on the positive side, and such a help effort is the most heart warming and satisfying thing you ever did in your life.

The Fancy Packaging Factor

Everywhere in the world people wish for the magic fix. Depending on the area, people might have a concept of what that would look like. For instance, in rural Zimbabwe, people hike miles through the hot savanna to the clinic outpost in order to receive the magic fix: an injection. When given pills (worst of all vitamin pills), they disappointedly throw them into the next bush. In Haiti, the magic lay in the fancy industrially made

packaging, and a tincture bottle went over a lot better than dried herbs in a locally made brown paper bag. The summit of magic where the flower essence spray bottles donated by FES. There may be stark generational differences – in Haiti, the older generation was very open to loose herb teas and to the idea of going out to gather a plant and make it into a cure. Having grown up with this, they often remembered local recipes themselves. Some of them even requested an herb tea. The young adults, however, often looked at us as if we were out of our minds when we tried to make them brew themselves a tea or worse, boil greens...

Mobilizing Local Resourcefulness

In order to avoid being just another foreign rescue effort that swoops down, helps, and is gone like a mirage, there are several things you can do to mobilize the resourcefulness of the locals. One of the best things is the give educational classes about the local healing plants and nutritional plants, such as moringa tree leaves. Another is to bring seeds of healing plants and find interested people to plant and propagate them. We also raised funds to have the local healer continue to offer free treatments to the poor, which reminded people that they had their own local healing tradition, cheap and at their disposal. Many Haitians, seeing us work with the local bone setter, remarked “o yes, I also have a leaf doctor (as they are called) in my neighborhood – I forgot that I could go see him / her for my ailment”.

The Tried and True – Most Universally Useful Remedies

We used 5 drops each of **lavender and tea tree essential oils** in 1 oz of vegetable oil externally / locally for all kinds of vaginal discharge, so ubiquitous in places with improper hygiene, and all kinds of skin rashes, infections and affections equally due to lack of hygiene. We used those two pure, one drop in the water supply for the whole day for a whole family (mix into the water) to disinfect the non-potable water and heard that this cleared up all skin affections and other disease due to lack of hygiene for the entire family.

We used **wormwood** for worms in great quantities and with good results.

The main remedies for malaria were **boneset and quinine** (homeopathically).

The best fever remedies were homeopathic **Belladonna and Aconite**.

The most important infant remedies were **Chamomile** (diarrhea, vomiting, fever, teething, tantrums, fretting, inconsolable screaming) and **Pulsatilla** (yellow and green snot, fever, diarrhea, vomiting in shy children).

Belladonna happened to be the most important homeopathic remedy in Haiti, since it was best suited to the host of fevers, nose bleeds, headaches due to heat and shock, high blood pressure and high blood pressure due to hyper-emotionality typical of this country and culture.

Arnica was indispensable for the physical traumas, head injuries from falling debris, as well as the physical, emotional and mental shock of the earthquake.

Flower essences in their various combinations were unequalled for healing the psychosomatic and trauma-induced physical and emotional disturbances.



Photos: Sandra Lory