

## **PUBLIC HEALTH IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT - THE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY PERSPECTIVE**

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The Health School of the Polytechnic Institute of Leiria created the "HumaniTer Project". This is a recent Project of the Occupational Therapy Educational Program, that arises from a partnership between the school and the NGO Doctors of the World to respond to the assumption of the Leiria Polytechnic Strategic Plan 2020 (IPL, 2017), promoting institutional relations and the integration of students in community intervention contexts. This project has been implemented last year in Castanheira de Pera, after the devastating fires that affect the region, with four students and a clinical educational supervisor integrated in the first humanitarian mission implemented in Portugal - Missão Esperança (Mission Hope).

The catastrophe context in place was terrible. The population is poor, with few studies, some even illiterate, poorly informed, lonely, unable to move by their one means, with many comorbidities and aged. The conditions and institutions in the community are not sufficiently responsive to the needs of the population at such times and in a catastrophe situation, as this, they have been undersized. Geographical features and isolation are severe and resources, such as transportation, are almost non-existent and alternatives too scarce or costly. This affects the population and consequently their ability to take care of themselves, even without being in catastrophic situations.

In a disaster context people lose their homes, their families, pets, garden, small farms, hobbies, roles and responsibilities, tasks, and so on...they get lost.

The World Federation of Occupational Therapists indicates that occupational therapists can collaborate with fragile communities to facilitate the reconstruction and reorganization of their lives and the re-encounter of significant occupations (Sinclair & Thomas, 2005). Occupational Therapy can assess the situation, reestablish occupations, restore meaningful activities to these people, find new tasks and functions to perform in order to rebuild their identity as occupational beings. It is extremely important to maintain activities, roles and responsibilities and avoid occupational deprivation while maintaining emotional balance.

In this framework, with the population victim of the Castanheira de Pera catastrophe, and to promote the public health, there were implemented community projects, such as tapestry, health education and literacy, home visits, recommendations on the adaptation of housing and institutional context, cognitive stimulation and movement sessions in groups, recommendations and training of assistive technology products for the daily living activities. The Occupational Therapists on the field also cooperate with different local institutions promoting community activities, lectures and actions promoting health.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Elisabete Roldao is an Occupational Therapist since 1992 and is now finishing her PhD in Rehabilitation at Lisbon University. She is a professor of Health School of the Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, Portugal. She is the President of the Portuguese Association of Occupational Therapists, the representative of Portugal in the World Federation of Occupational Therapists and in the Council of Occupational Therapists for the European Countries. She is a member of the Technical Assessment Committee of the Occupational Therapy Area, and a member of the Working Group for the Analysis and Presentation of Proposals in the field of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation in Ambulatory, created by the Central Administration of the Health System, IP. She is also a member of the Regional Council of Mental Health of ARSLVT. She is the Director of the Magazine APTO and the founding member of the International Interest Group of the Portuguese Association of Occupational Therapists.

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