Code of Practice on the Use of Information, Images and other Audio-Visual Material in Disaster Training and Presentations

Introduction

Many images of dead or injured people are now available after every disaster. These are used, quite rightly, extensively in teaching and training. However, the injured have a right to privacy which includes their photos not being used without their permission. The dead, recognised by the International Committee of the Red Cross and Interpol's Standing Committee on Disaster Victim Identification, have the right not to lose their identities after death. Disaster Action believes this extends to a continuing right to privacy.

Who this Code of Practice is for

This code of practice is primarily intended for those preparing and delivering disaster-related training and other presentations, particularly those which include the potential to identify individuals or victims witnessing, experiencing or confronting death. This code is also relevant for anyone involved in processing, recording, storing and archiving such disaster-related materials and others involved in sharing or disseminating such material in the course of their professional work.

Disaster-related training includes professional development programmes and specialist education or practitioner training courses. Specialist subject areas include forensic sciences, Disaster Victim Identification, disaster studies and management, media training and death studies. The kinds of locations where access to information and images relevant to this code may arise include disaster sites and scenes (both during and after disaster impact); mortuaries and laboratories and other forensic working environments; and other disaster-related settings which become the focus for grief rituals and mourning, e.g. tribute sites, funerals and memorials.

'Information', images' or 'materials' here includes photographs, audio and video recordings of individuals killed or injured (including psychologically traumatised) in disasters. Sources might include materials generated through social media, though the spirit of the code is also relevant for those preparing other kinds of information and resources such as disaster reports, research papers or journalists' accounts.

Guiding principle in selecting training materials

Choices around the selection and presentation of training materials should be based on the paramount principle of respect for the subject(s) in the material, whether living or dead people. A useful guide is to imagine a family member of the deceased is in the audience; how might they feel about the use of this material and in this way?

While following this guiding principle, consideration should be given to:

- the aim and purpose of the presentation and selection of the most appropriate and effective material for addressing the learning objectives
- the potential impact of using the image(s) or sharing information on the audience's wellbeing, balancing a need to know or view with protection from unnecessary stress and exposure to psychological harm
- Respect for individuals' rights to privacy, dignity and respect, including after death, and the interests and wishes of their families, associates and colleagues (regardless of whether they are

aware of or in the audience for the presentation).

Giving anonymity

Non-essential identifying details of individuals should be omitted wherever possible. As well as protecting the identity of persons – living or dead – presenters should be aware that images which personalise death and injury can be especially distressing and potentially traumatising.

Avoiding sensationalism

Disaster-related images and material should not be used for sensationalist impact or shock effect. Using materials for appropriate learning objectives, but which may also include a shock effect, is acceptable. In such circumstances, however, the material should be appropriately introduced and a warning given.

'In the public domain'

The fact that material may be already in the public domain should not be used to rationalise or justify the use or sharing of insensitive, graphic or inappropriate information or images. Those who have been harmed once are only subjected to further risk, harm or insult.

Clarity of intention and avoiding gratuitous use

Trainers or presenters should reflect on and be clear in their own minds about why they wish to show, share or discuss particular images or details and should ask themselves what specific need is being met through their use or sharing. The sharing and discussion of information and material should not be driven by the presenters' personal need for affirmation or recognition or to fulfil psychological needs, whether conscious or unconscious.

In considering what specific learning objective is being fulfilled, the questions to ask are: to what extent is the information, image or level of detail useful or necessary? Does it add to what is being said? If it is being used to illustrate a point, could alternative, more appropriate material or, for example, less personal, identifiable or graphic be given instead?

Permission when showing images of deceased people

Where family members have not been given access to information, images or details about or directly relating to a loved one that may be identified or identifiable through a presentation, that material should not be used first in training or presentations. Where family members have been given access to such material, steps should first be taken to obtain permission from them for its further use in training or presentations.

Protecting audiences and giving choices

When using sensitive, graphic or potentially distressing images or details in a presentation, audiences should be warned in advance. Depending on the nature of the training or audience such content may, for example, include showing injured, bleeding or dead people, or body parts. Where appropriate, audience members should be given an opportunity to avoid exposure to this. This may include being excused for all or part of a presentation or invited to turn away their head or close their eyes; the presenter should then indicate when the presentation is over. Individuals choosing not to be exposed

to materials should not be stigmatised.

Giving individuals choices in these ways informs them about the traumatic potential of such subjects and teaches them significant ethical values around informed choices and sensitivity as an important aspect of working in these fields.

Record keeping, sharing and dissemination

The right of individuals to privacy, dignity and respect extends to the way information, images and audio recordings are stored, archived, shared and disseminated. We suggest the values around privacy, dignity and respect also extend beyond life to include consideration of the impact on families and other friends/associates of keeping, sharing and disseminating details relating to an individual about and after their death. Over and above formal or legal requirements such as data protection legislation or organisational procedures (such as social media policies), ethical parameters around trust and confidentiality should be considered in relation to records and their management. For more on this, see Disaster Action's code of practice on privacy, anonymity and confidentiality (www.disasteraction.org.uk).

Promoting this code of practice and ethical standards generally

Presenters and trainers are encouraged not only to reflect on and apply this code but are also requested to share, discuss with others and promote the ethical principles and standards captured in this guidance. In this way ethical standards in disaster-related training and presentations are more likely to be upheld and advanced and also the wider ethical treatment of all people involved in confronting and dealing with death and disasters, both lay and professional, living or dead.