



## **The Psychiatric Association of Turkey (PAT) February 13-19, 2023 Earthquake Activities**

After the earthquake on February 6th, the Executive Committee and PAT Disaster Preparedness and Intervention Unit gathered all its staff to create a Disaster Crisis Management plan. Following the call for volunteers made in the first days, 727 of our colleagues are ready to provide support in the earthquake-affected areas. As stated in the Volunteer Activities Report dated February 13, 2023 (<https://psikiyatri.org.tr/TPDDData/Uploads/files/PATActivitiesforthe13February2023.pdf>), PAT is organizing its dispatch of volunteers as the assignments organized with the Ministry of Health have stalled. Assignments between universities have also been made possible through the activities of our association. The dispatch of our volunteers to the city centers and district centers in the earthquake-affected areas has started. Our volunteers are involved in organizational activities in addition to providing psychiatric services in the field. In the field evaluation reports prepared by our volunteers, the situation of mental health services is evaluated by making a situation determination, field, and resource analysis according to the provinces, emergency measures to be taken in the short term are defined, disaster situation, demographic effects, and service plans are included. Reports on each region will be compiled and shared in a short time.

The first fieldwork was carried out in the Hatay and Adana regions (<https://psikiyatri.org.tr/3704/tpd-hatay-ve-adana-ilk-hafta-alan-degerlendirmesi-raporu>). The area assessment report was sent to relevant ministries and professional organizations. Two caravans were directed to areas of urgent need with a field observation team consisting of two Executive Committee and PAT Disaster Preparedness and Intervention Unit members, to make the current field assessments, determine the needs in the field, organize the services, and provide accommodation to our volunteers. In addition to the PAT's resources, financial support from a pharmaceutical company (Ali



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Raif İlaç) and direct institutional support from the Antalya Medical Chamber were obtained for the financing of these caravans. We have also started planning for the provision of safe housing and service conditions for our volunteers with the procurement of PAT-owned caravans and tents.

In the meeting held with the Ministry of Health, it was stated that we have psychiatric teams with experience in emergency psychiatric intervention and that the presence of psychiatrists is not limited to field work but would also be an assurance for other exhausted healthcare workers who work intensively in the region. It was emphasized that it is essential to rest the psychiatrists who have been forced to work in the region and to appoint temporarily those who are willing to volunteer. It was also stated that we have volunteer lists to participate in the work, and we proposed cooperation for the regulation of the situations of volunteers who will go to the region. The Ministry was informed about the activities of the Disaster Preparedness Intervention Unit.

It was pointed out that there is a need to determine a strategy for the early, middle, and late-term intervention and rehabilitation programs in collaboration with the Ministry of Family and Social Services. It was also stated that the Psychiatric Association of Turkey, Turkish Psychological Association, Public Health Specialists Association, Ministry of Health, and related ministries should come together to create a Strategic Plan that will be urgently followed, and that we are ready to contribute in any way possible.

Due to complaints reported to us about the compulsory work of state officials in the earthquake zone, PAT have reported our legal opinion regarding the obligation of the administration not to force state officials in earthquake-affected areas to work under The General Directorate of Management Services of the Ministry of Health's legal basis stated in the circular titled "administrative leave" dated February 11, 2023. It was suggested that healthcare workers in the disaster zone who are forced to work in any way without their requests, and whose mental health does not allow them to work, should apply to a healthcare institution for evaluation of their situations, necessary reporting, and informing the administration.



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A briefing note containing suggestions for maintaining the working system, information and case management, communication and team spirit, and coordination and harmonization with higher authorities and other institutions for the protection of the mental health of healthcare workers was sent to the healthcare centers in the region.

We received numerous notifications from our members who want to provide mental health services to earthquake victims or their relatives without charging any fees. The Legal Office shared its opinion on whether tax liability arises from these activities and how financial records should be kept (<https://psikiyatri.org.tr/3708/deprem-yasayanlarin-veya-yakinlarinin-ucuret-alinmaksizin-ruh-sagligi-hizmetlerin>).

188 colleagues responded to the call for volunteers for the PAT Online Psychosocial Support Platform. Communication channels were established for volunteers. The working algorithm of the platform and the sample consultation form to be used were established. A meeting was scheduled for February 21st Tuesday to introduce the platform and to give a briefing about the plans to the volunteers.

PAT Post-Earthquake Mental Support Supervision Sessions were planned. The first session, to be conducted by Prof. Dr. Işıl Vahip and Prof. Dr. Ejder Akgün Yıldırım, was scheduled for February 20th Monday at 8:00 PM, and the topic was determined as "Early Approach".

The PAT Earthquake and Mental Health website was updated with new documents. The "Information Note for Bipolar Disorder Diagnosed Patients After the Earthquake" prepared by the Mood Disorders Section and the "Treatment Guide for Schizophrenia and Psychotic Disorders in Mass Traumas and Disasters" prepared by the Schizophrenia and Other Psychotic Disorders Section were added to the website. With the questions received from the general public and the notifications from our colleagues, a "For Our Children" tab was added to the Earthquake and Mental Health page. Texts were included for the community, caregivers/parents, and mental health professionals. Upon receiving notifications of applications recommended to be controversial or potentially harmful on



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social media and messaging applications, it was decided to prepare and disseminate information cards on evidence-based practices in the early intervention.

The association contacted institutions that requested psychosocial support due to the earthquake. It was reported that over 2,000 people from more than 10 cities, including employees of private organizations operating in the region, search and rescue teams, and unions operating in the region required support. Urgent requests were organized to be directed to mental health centers that provide emergency services, while non-urgent requests were directed to the Psychosocial Support Network in nearby cities or outpatient clinics providing disaster-related mental health support services online or face-to-face. Collaboration was established with the Group Psychotherapies Section and the Turkish Group Psychotherapies Association for such institutional requests.

An organizational chart was created for disaster management in PAT branches. Representatives were requested to be appointed from the branches to ensure coordination with the central office and the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD). Centers that can provide relatively healthy and safe mental health services in nearby cities were listed, and coordination between these centers and the affected region began.

Sincerely,

**PAT Disaster Crisis Management**