

Introduction

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Natural disasters provide a constant reminder of the power and capricious nature of our planet. The depletion of the ozone layer and global warming mean that the future may hold in store calamitous events with even greater magnitude than those experienced before. National conflicts and ideological differences have not lessened and the resultant 'unnatural disasters' have the potential to rival the natural ones in enormity (see Chapter 34). Disasters by their very nature are unpredictable and no two are alike. Nevertheless, there are numerous common elements and it has been shown that countries that invest in disaster preparedness are better equipped to cope with such catastrophes. Recent wars and disasters have highlighted the increasingly crucial role of surgeons in these scenarios.

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