



# Audiology in Times of Disaster



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# Introduction

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- The passage of hurricanes Irma and Maria through the island of Puerto Rico brought new challenges to the audiology community.
- This required the refocus of clinician's role, in order to response to the patient's necessities.
- This kind of atmospheric phenomena is not “unique” to our island.
- Sharing what we learned from it might help you or give you an idea in how to face similar situations.

# Objectives

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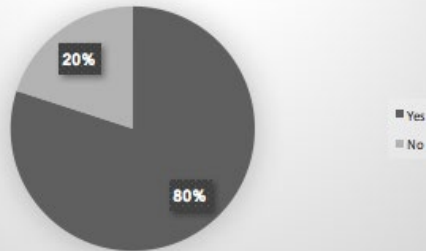
- Discuss the disaster's **audiological impact** in the general community, audiologists and patients.
- Offer insights in how to **effectively access and help** the community in need.
- Share strategies to effectively **counsel** the affected communities.

# Disaster's Impact

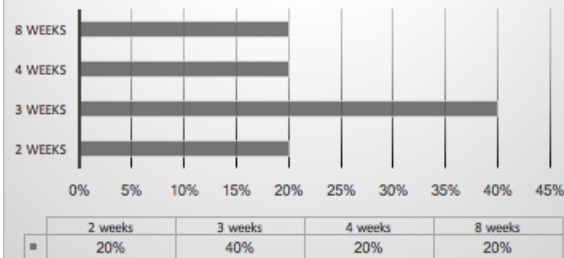


- General Community
  - Abrupt changes to their daily routine
- Audiologist
  - Physical damages to clinics and equipments
  - No power = No tecnología
  - Lack of patient flow

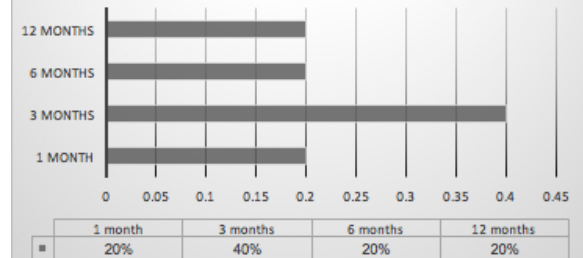
Physical damage to facilities



Time the clinic remained closed after hurricanes Irma and María



Time it has taken your clinic to recover the normal flow of patients



# Disaster's Impact

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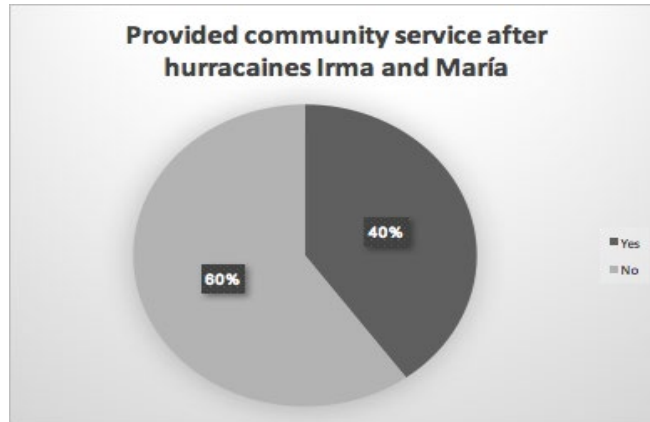


- Patient
  - No communication with their clinicians
  - No power: can't charge their hearing aids/ ran out of batteries
  - Darkness = no visual cues
  - Generators:
    - Stressor
    - Impact on patients with tinnitus
    - More noise= bigger barrier for patients with hearing loss

# First challenge: Access



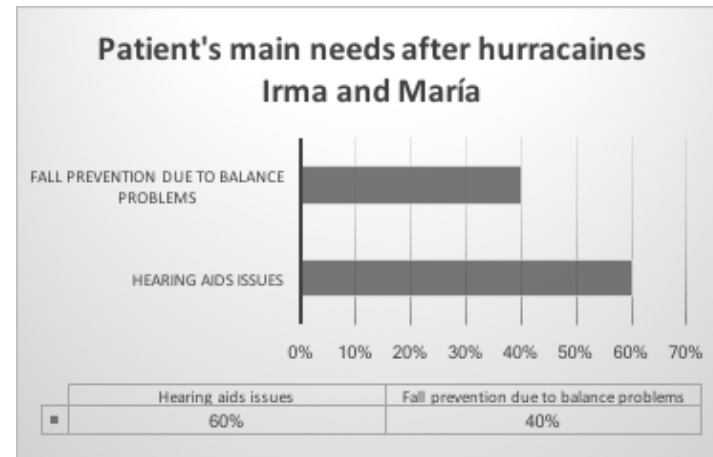
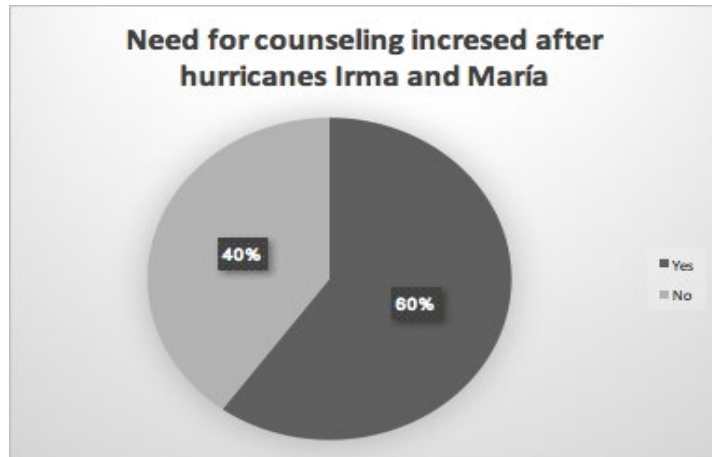
- Patients missed their appointments
  - No communication
  - Hindered access due to damaged roads and streets
  - Lack of gas
- Humanitarian service
- Point of contact



# Strategies for effective counseling



- Emotional vulnerability requires appropriate approaches.
  - Empathy
  - Provide simple written educational material/guides (hard copies)
  - Attention to patient's main concern
    - Focus on **prevention** and **hearing aids issues** (delivery, repair and replacement)



# Fall Prevention

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- Darkness + Lack of Visual Cues + Balance Problems = **Potential Falls**
- Provide orientation regarding:
  - Identification of risk of falling areas
  - Use of flashlights/ solar lamps during night time
  - Use of safety handles



# Hearing aids issues

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- Delivery of hearing aids
- Teach your patient how to perform simple troubleshootings and repairs
  - Tubing changes
  - Filter changing
  - Inspect battery contacts (cleanness and free of humidity/moisture)
  - Stack disposable batteries and watch for expiration dates
- Hearing aid replacement
  - Counsel your patient to keep hearing aid in a safe place
  - Safe electronic and hard copies of the hearing aid guarantee

# Communication Strategies

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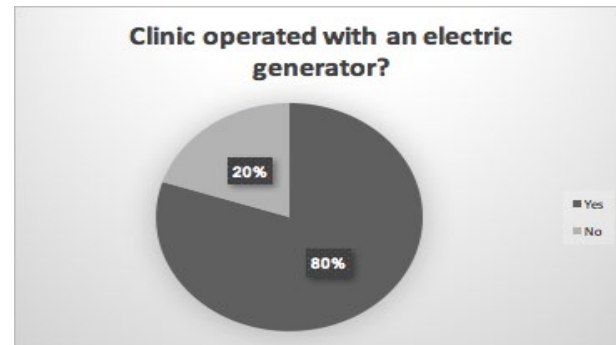
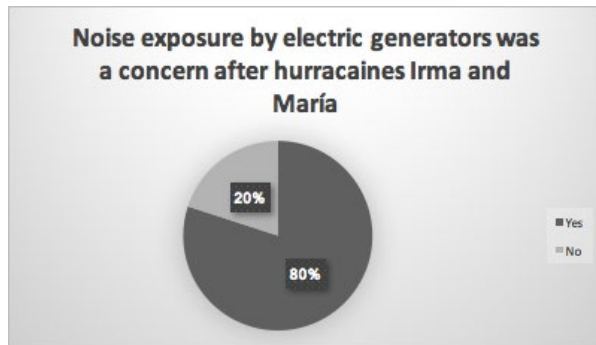


- Many patients lost/suffered damages on their devices. In these cases, a communication strategies counseling was vital.
- Develop an informational sheet to serve as a guide to your patient and patient's family. These should include both preventive and reparative. For example:
  - Reinforcement on visual cues
  - Facing the person with hearing loss while having a conversation
  - Avoid long/complex sentences
  - Having a notebook

# Keep in mind your particular challenges



- Electric Generators: “New Noise Exposure Source”
- Noise exposure became a “real” concern for our patients.
  - This kind of noise exposition last for months becoming hazardous for hearing health
- Ironically, even audiology clinics became a noise exposure source



# Conclusions

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- Challenges like this one, are an opportunity to reinforce and reinvent the way we practice audiology.
- Absence of technology drives us to incorporate simple strategies to facilitate the complex activity of communication.
- Gave us a perspective of the importance of our role in our patient's life.
- Showed us the importance of preparing an intervention plan based on prevention.
- Reveal the importance of empathy and compassion as clinicians.

# References

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