



PITTSBURGH PREPARES FOR BIOTERRORISM RESPONSE WITH FLU SHOT DRILL

IF PREDICTIONS ABOUT AVIAN FLU ARE CORRECT OR IF TERRORISTS UNLEASH A DEADLY BIOAGENT IN A MAJOR URBAN AREA, ONE OF THE FIRST LINES OF DEFENSE LIKELY WILL BE MASS IMMUNIZATIONS. EMEDHEALTH, A CUTTING-EDGE EMERGENCY MEDICINE AND EMS PROGRAM IN PITTSBURGH, ISN'T WAITING FOR THAT DAY. INSTEAD, AS PART OF A PROGRAM THAT FORESHADOWS THE FUTURE OF EMS IN PUBLIC HEALTH CARE, EMEDHEALTH HAS ALREADY BEGUN TO DETERMINE HOW MEDICS CAN BEST DELIVER MASS VACCINATIONS DURING A PUBLIC HEALTH DISASTER.

“Every city is struggling over the concern of how to administer a mass vaccination if such an emergency should arise,” said Dan Swayze, founder of EmedHealth and director of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) prehospital care program.

To answer that question, EmedHealth conducted a bioterrorism drill in August 2005. By distributing about 200 doses of a pneumonia vaccine to four senior community centers, organizers wanted to test how quickly paramedics could administer mass immunizations at a number of decentralized sites during a disaster.

“Our goal was to figure out how to be better prepared for an emergency,” said Swayze. “It worked out great because it was a drill for us, and at the same time, we were providing a valuable service by administering a real vaccination to people.”

Community Health Infrastructure

The need for mass immunizations is not new to Pittsburgh paramedics. After remnants of Hurricane Ivan caused widespread flooding in September 2004, they were called upon to help vaccinate 10,000 people against tetanus at 40 clinics in one week.

“EMS offers a community the resources

necessary to create a strong safety net to ensure that all patients receive preventive medical services, and to better manage their chronic disease,” Swayze explained. While organizers didn’t have an opportunity at that time to study the effectiveness of the mass immunization, the effort did reveal the importance of media in getting health care information to the public.

“We had many people show up for the tetanus shots because of the coverage from the media,” said Swayze. “It will be important to get the word out quickly about what kind of medical assistance you can receive, where you can go to receive it and when.”

According to Swayze, paramedics may be more available than physicians and nurses in a large-scale crisis, especially in rural areas. “Holding vaccinations at temporary clinics like senior centers at dispersed locations could limit the spread of disease,” he said. “It could also help to prevent a secondary terrorist attack at a larger, central location, like a stadium, where more people gather to seek medical care.”

Paul Paris, MD, is the chief medical officer of the Center for Emergency Medicine and medical advisor for EmedHealth. “We would like to see an expanded role for emergency medicine



in helping provide for preventive services,” he said. “We want EMS providers to be out there performing a variety of wellness activities. This program integrates EMS and emergency departments into the community health infrastructure.”

Decentralized Approach

During the bioterrorism drill, Swayze and his team found that a numbering system similar to one you would find at any deli — proved to be efficient. Seniors waited in line as their numbers were called. “This method provided some order and kept the process flowing rather smoothly for everyone involved,” he said.

Swayze and Paris were satisfied with the outcome of the drill and are talking conceptually about doing another one on a broader scale. “We feel that the process worked well,” said Swayze. “We especially feel having the clinics spread out in different locations is what will work out best because it will eliminate bottlenecks in a real-life emergency. Doing this at smaller sites also helped with the logistical issues, too.”

Paris added, “I think we proved the concept ourselves that probably the best way to quickly administer vaccinations in a decentralized way is an EMS-based approach.”

Don't Be Bashful:

IT'S SMART TO BOAST ABOUT FEDERAL GRANTS TO THE PUBLIC AND THE MEDIA

IN 2002, ST. TAMMANY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT 4 IN MANDEVILLE, LOUISIANA, RECEIVED A GRANT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (DHS) TO PURCHASE FIVE NEW 12-LEAD DEFIBRILLATOR/MONITORING DEVICES TO REPLACE THEIR EXISTING THREE-LEAD DEFIBRILLATORS. St. Tammany EMS Director Frank Jordan said that, “Because of the grant, our prehospital care has improved dramatically. The 12-lead device puts the physician on the scene, so that we can start treating patients in the field, 15 to 20 minutes before they arrive at the hospital.”

St. Tammany FPD is not the only emergency agency to receive EMS funding through the DHS Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Program. In fact, in 2005, close to \$13 million was allocated for training and/or the purchase of equipment by EMS agencies.

A successful grant application is always news you should publicize, especially during EMS Week, when the awareness of emergency medical services is heightened. “You need to communicate with the residents whom you serve,” said Mt. Lebanon Fire Chief Stephen Darcangelo, whose Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, department received a \$150,000 AFG award to purchase new breathing apparatus. “You have to let them know that the organizations that serve them are trying to improve themselves.”

Not only does publicizing your grant show your community that you are improving the department, more importantly, it shows them that you are reaching out for funding sources other than local tax dollars. “Grants that allow us to improve ourselves and don't affect

the local taxes are another positive benefit,” Darcangelo said.

Here are some tips you can follow to publicize your own grants:

■ **Target your local community paper.** Learn which reporter writes stories about your local community. Contact that person via e-mail or phone and tell him or her about your project or new initiative.

■ **Write a brief press release with a catchy lead and essential information.** Keep it to one page and let the reader know what the grant will be used for. DHS provides a press release template at www.firegrantsupport.com/afg/awards/05/.

■ **Send your release ASAP after your grant is announced.** The sooner a press release is sent out, the more newsworthy its content is for the media. Call to follow up with reporters with whom you have an established relationship.

■ **Find a good visual.** The media, particularly television, are more interested in stories that have good visuals. A grant in itself may not be newsworthy, but what will entice the media to give you coverage is something that the grant will be used for — such as a defibrillator or a bioterrorism response training program that the media and the public can observe in action.

“Always try to tie your grant to something that can be visible to people,” advised Susan Gwiasda, public relations officer for Ames, Iowa. “Showcase that new equipment or new initiative and make a big deal about it. Make sure you can answer the question “Why should people care?” and then show them why.”