

Emergency Preparedness Coordinating Council

GNYHA has created an Emergency Preparedness Coordinating Council to help members review and enhance their emergency preparedness and disaster response plans in light of the World Trade Center disaster and the subsequent anthrax attacks. The coordinating council brings together representatives of GNYHA members, other provider organizations, and local, State, and Federal public health and emergency management agencies to encourage collaboration and communication across the region and ultimately to ensure a more integrated response to any future attacks or events. Through this collaborative planning process, the council is helping GNYHA's members prepare for future disasters through the sharing of expertise, experiences, templates, and other information. The council has also developed several group purchasing arrangements to encourage efficiencies and cost-savings.

The coordinating council began its activities in early November 2001 and has met almost weekly since then, through full council meetings, workgroup meetings, and membership briefings on topics identified through the coordinating council.

Data Collection Initiatives

GNYHA's emergency preparedness coordinating council has identified key data elements that should be collected before, during, and after an emergency, and has developed mechanisms and systems for collecting these data.

- ▶ **Emergency Contacts Directory.** To improve communications in response to an emergency, GNYHA has developed a directory of key contact information for local, State, and Federal agencies, private agencies, key vendors, and other services. GNYHA has also compiled information about members' emergency operations centers and key emergency personnel and capabilities.
- ▶ **Syndromic Surveillance Data.** The coordinating council has facilitated both the State's and the localities' efforts to undertake regular syndromic surveillance in order to identify clusters of symptoms as soon as possible. For example, 38 hospitals in New York City currently submit daily emergency department logs to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. The State is also undertaking a pilot project to implement this activity throughout the State. To encourage participation in these activities, GNYHA has provided a membership briefing at which representatives of New York City, New York State, and the Federal government discussed their initiatives in the area of syndromic surveillance and the importance of provider vigilance and reporting.
- ▶ **Bed, Staffing, and Supply Needs/Availability.** The coordinating council has worked with the New York State Department of Health to develop a Web-based system, modeled after a system designed by the New York-Presbyterian Healthcare System, to collect data on bed, staffing, and supply needs and availability in the event of an emergency. The information collected will be shared with local emergency management and public health officials. "Work-arounds" for supplying data have been developed in the event a hospital is unable to access the system.
- ▶ **Event-Related Visits.** The Web-based data collection system is also designed to collect

information about event-related visits to emergency rooms, admissions, mortalities, and unidentified patients.

- ▶ **Patient Locator System.** Finally, the same system will be prepared to collect the names of patients being seen at area hospitals during a disaster in order to create a patient locator system. The World Trade Center disaster demonstrated the need for such a critical vehicle to enable family members looking for loved ones to determine whether they may have been taken to a hospital. GNYHA assisted in creating this vehicle on September 11 by helping to organize patient names provided by area hospitals and in turn creating a patient locator system that could be accessed via New York City's official Web site.

Improving Communications

Many GNYHA members experienced significant disruptions in communication services as a result of the World Trade Center disaster either because of high call volume or because their communications infrastructure was destroyed. The following activities of the coordinating council are designed to minimize future disruptions:

- ▶ **Communications Options.** GNYHA has prepared a matrix identifying various communications options and describing each option's functionality and limitations.
- ▶ **Undertaking Risk Assessments.** The council has discussed how to undertake communication risk assessments designed to identify vulnerabilities and solutions for avoiding potential disruptions. GNYHA has also presented a broader membership briefing on this issue.
- ▶ **Group Purchasing.** GNYHA Services, Inc., has negotiated group purchasing arrangements for cellular phones with two-way radio options.
- ▶ **800 Megahertz Radios.** GNYHA has worked with the NYC Office of Emergency Management (OEM) to facilitate the purchase of 800 Megahertz radios and the reinstatement of a special health care talk channel on OEM's radio system so that NYC area facilities can communicate with each other and OEM. GNYHA has identified similar linkages for members outside NYC as well.

Identifying and Responding to Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Events

The council has devoted significant efforts to enhancing providers' ability to detect and respond to nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) events.

- ▶ **Training and Education Programs.** Training and education are key to the health care system's ability to identify an NBC agent, to provide appropriate treatment, and to institute containment measures. To date, GNYHA has provided numerous briefings on these and related topics:
 - "Identifying and Responding to Biological and Chemical Events"
 - "Identifying and Responding to Anthrax"
 - "Use of Incident Command System"
 - "Identifying and Responding to Smallpox"
 - "Hazmat Training"
 - "Pre-Hospital Response to NBC Events"

- “JCAHO Emergency Management Requirements”
- “Identifying and Responding to Nuclear Events”
- “Health Care Facility Security Issues”
- “Roles of Emergency Management Agencies”
- “Syndromic Surveillance”
- “Emergency Data Systems”

Many of these programs can be viewed on GNYHA’s Web site at www.gnyha.org via streaming video provided by GNYHA’s affiliate, Stream57. Additional programs have been planned on the topics of chemical events, evacuations, technology security, and undertaking disaster drills.

- ▶ **E-Mail Service.** GNYHA provides extensive information to its members through immediate distribution via e-mail of health alerts and other information released by local, State, and Federal agencies and other authorities.
- ▶ **GNYHA Web Site.** GNYHA provides extensive information on the issue of emergency preparedness on its Web site at www.gnyha.org.
- ▶ **Training and Education Materials.** GNYHA is working with the council to develop training materials on NBC events that can be used to train and educate the following audiences:
 - the community at large, the media, and area leaders;
 - employees of health care institutions; and
 - physicians and other practitioners who must be able to identify and respond to such events.

The challenge has been to take the extensive training and education materials that already exist and to distill them into useful, practical, and accessible formats to ensure broad-based education and distribution to the targeted audiences.

Development of Guidelines

Finally, the council has been working to develop guidelines to address a number of key issues related to emergency preparedness, including the following:

- ▶ Responding to Nuclear and Chemical Events
- ▶ Biological Event Preparedness Guidelines
- ▶ Personal Protective Equipment and Decontamination Capacity
- ▶ Supplies and Stockpiles
- ▶ Internal Security and Lockdown Issues
- ▶ Employee Communications
- ▶ Managing Volunteers
- ▶ Media Relations
- ▶ Evacuation Procedures