

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH HEALTH ADVISORY

TO: Hospital and Health System CEOs and Chief Operating Officers
Executive Director, MSSNY
Executive Director NYSNA

SUBJECT: Hurricane Katrina Response Update

DATE: September 2, 2005

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, NYSDOH has been working diligently to ensure that our State's public health and healthcare assets will be available to assist individuals whose lives and health continue to be in jeopardy. Earlier today, NYSDOH participated in a conference call with U.S. Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Michael Leavitt to discuss how hospitals and professional associations across the country can assist in the massive relief efforts. According to the Secretary, a Section 319 Public Health Emergency has been declared for that area. The Federal Government, led by DHHS and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), will be creating a temporary medical infrastructure to assist both those individuals impacted by the storm, as well as those patients whose course of care has been interrupted by the hurricane's impact on local medical facilities.

Under this system, the Federal Government will be setting up basic medical shelters in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and surrounding states. Ten shelters will be established by Friday, September 2, with an additional 10 shelters staged by early next week. Each shelter will be staffed by approximately 100 health care providers, including doctors, nurses, allied health professionals, and mental health care providers. As of today, health care providers from the U.S. Public Health Service, Department of Defense (DOD), and Department of Veterans Affairs have been deployed.

According to Secretary Leavitt, the goal of the medical shelters is to stabilize patients, provide courses of treatment, and fill prescriptions that may have lapsed during the storm's aftermath. Additionally, patients requiring further care may be transported to medical facilities in surrounding areas. National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) identified 2,600 beds that are available in the twelve states surrounding the disaster and has identified 40,000 beds nationwide.

How New York State's Healthcare Professionals Can Help

Although definitive information is not yet available, we expect to know more within the next 24 to 48 hours. ***In the meantime, it is critically important that we focus our efforts in ways that will assist, and not hinder, the relief process.*** To that end, we are reminding all potential volunteers that individuals and organizations wishing to help should ***not*** report directly to the affected areas. People who self-deploy to the impacted areas only hamper rescue efforts that are underway and put themselves and others in harm's way.

Therefore, we are asking that hospitals and associations instead begin the process of “rostering,” that is, identifying teams comprising individuals with a variety of specialized skills who would be willing to help. Rostering by medical specialty will ensure a coordinated response from New York’s health professionals that will maximize our ability to assist in the relief efforts, once details are finalized. Response teams should be capable of enduring marginal, rigorous living and working conditions. We expect teams will be deployed for a minimum of two weeks, and perhaps longer. These teams may be institutionally based, and organized through a sponsoring hospital or group of hospitals.

NYSDOH will be responsible for identifying and tracking healthcare volunteer teams from New York State, once deployed. To assist us in this effort we are asking that NYS Hospitals provide information on teams or individual volunteers that are deployed to their Hospital Associations, who will in turn, provide the NYSDOH the information.

While we wait for more details, we ask that you begin to consider if your facility or organization is in a position to participate in this initiative. Your facility will be contacted with additional information and details.

If you have any questions, please contact the Public Health Preparedness Program at (518) 474-2893 or (518) 408-5163.