

REGIONAL HEALTHCARE TASK FORCE DEVELOPMENT-LESSONS LEARNED

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OBJECTIVE: The National Bioterrorism Civilian Medical Response Center (CIMERC) strives to develop tools that produce an effective integrated response to complex medical emergencies. CIMERC continues to work to meet the needs of health care organizations, emergency managers and disaster responders, challenged by disparate capabilities and limited resources, as they plan for an integrated response to natural or man-made disasters.

METHOD: CIMERC convened a consortium of medical and disaster response experts throughout the Philadelphia metropolitan area. The objective was to improve the overall readiness and coordination of regional health systems to respond to natural and man-made mass casualty incidents. The urban task force formed six functional working groups: Education, Operations and Logistics, Public Relations, Long Range Planning, Data, and Communications.

The second phase involved the establishment of a similar task force in rural Pennsylvania to address the challenges unique to rural environments. Transportation and time limitations proved to be especially difficult for the rural group. CIMERC used expertise from the previous task force efforts to overcome such challenges, as well as to address certain geographical and technological limitations.

RESULTS: The rural and urban disaster preparedness task force projects resulted in a significantly improved working relationship among state hospitals and health systems, public and government agencies, and others active in disaster planning and response. Specific benefits resulting from this effort include the development of a Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical information resource CD, an exercise workbook for mass casualty incident preparedness, and the development and delivery of accredited disaster preparedness seminars and tabletop disaster drills.

CONCLUSION: The challenges of disaster response can be addressed through task force development in both urban and rural settings. Task force teams assist in the development of useful resources for specific regional threats, and benefit from the sharing of lessons learned by other organizations and individuals.

KEYWORDS: Preparedness, Disaster Response, Rural