



# Disaster Preparedness and Response

## Opportunities to Serve Medically During Disasters

Most disaster response groups that use medical professionals, including family physicians, require those professionals to complete some preparation, which usually includes submitting an application, going through a review process and attending specific training. Some of these groups are listed below.

### **MEDICAL RESERVE CORPS**

The Medical Reserve Corps, or MRC, uses a variety of health care professionals to supplement existing emergency and public health resources during disasters and emergencies. MRC units are community-based, organizing and utilizing local volunteers who want to donate their time and expertise to prepare for and respond to disasters. In addition, these units participate in programs and activities designed to strengthen the public health infrastructure of their communities. In most cases, MRC members volunteer their services and do not receive payment when the MRC is activated.

The Office of the U.S. Surgeon General sponsors the national MRC Program Office. The program office provides general assistance to local units developed by state departments of health and other health organizations. The MRC Web site at <http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov> provides registration information and a list of more than 600 MRC units nationwide.

Qualifications include state licensure and other certification as specified by the local unit. MRC units may elect to provide services outside their states or locales; in such cases, licensure and liability coverage will vary depending on the locale receiving the unit. (A general policy of nationwide licensure and liability coverage is undergoing development, but has not yet been completed.) It would be prudent to investigate licensure and liability coverage before proceeding to another state to provide care.

### **DISASTER MEDICAL ASSISTANCE TEAMS**

Disaster Medical Assistance Teams, or DMATs, are designed for rapid response to a disaster — that is, response during the first 72 hours after a disaster. DMATs deploy to disaster sites with sufficient equipment and

supplies to sustain themselves for a period of 72 hours while providing medical care at a fixed or temporary medical care site.

In mass casualty incidents, DMAT members' responsibilities may include triaging patients, providing critical medical care under the adverse circumstances typically found at a disaster site and preparing patients for evacuation. In other situations, DMATs may provide primary medical care or augment the efforts of overloaded local health care staff.

Each team has a sponsoring organization, such as a major medical center; public health or safety agency; or nonprofit, public or private organization, that signs a memorandum of agreement with the National Disaster Medical System, or NDMS, a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

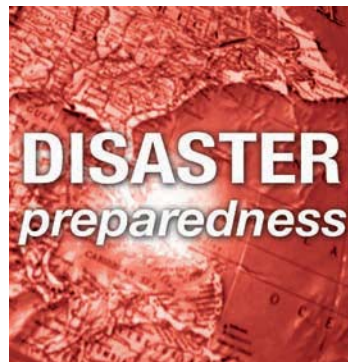
Qualifications include state licensure and specialty certification as specified by the DMAT. DMATs function principally as community resources available to support local, regional and state emergency response efforts. However, as a national resource, teams can be federalized, if needed. When a team is activated, members become part-time federal employees and their certification is recognized by all states.

As part-time federal employees, team members receive payment when the team is activated. Similarly, liability coverage is provided based on team members' federal employee status.

More information, including a list of existing DMATs, is available from the NDMS Web site at <http://oep-ndms.dhhs.gov/teams/dmat.html>. Links to existing DMATs are available at <http://www.dmat.org/teamlinks.html>.

### **EMERGENCY SYSTEM FOR ADVANCE REGISTRATION OF VOLUNTEER HEALTH PROFESSIONALS**

The Emergency System for Advance Registration of Volunteer Health Professionals, or ESAR-VHP, was authorized by Congress in direct response to the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Under a provision of Public Health Law 107-188, the Health Resources and Services Administration helps states establish a standardized



volunteer registration system that maintains an up-to-date list of volunteer identity, license, credentials, accreditation and hospital privileges. The ESAR-VHP Web site at <http://www.hrsa.gov/esarvhp> defines the program and provides guidelines for registering.

The extent to which this program has been developed varies from state to state, but it has the potential to connect volunteers nationwide for response during a major disaster.

### **COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAMS**

Community Emergency Response Teams, or CERTs, educate community members about disaster preparation and provide training in basic disaster response skills, including disaster medical operations.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency initiated the CERT program in 1993, and the program is now a part of the Citizen Corps. More than 45 states have CERT programs in place. Although there is a place for physicians in this program, the training is largely aimed

at general community members. More information about CERTs and a list of existing programs can be found at the Citizen Corps Web site at <http://www.citizencorps.gov/cert>.

Other terms used by various states for workers who are registered and trained for emergency response include temporary emergency workers/registered emergency workers. Teams trained via these programs may or may not be considered CERTs.

### **NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS**

Numerous non-government organizations respond during disasters and need medical volunteers. These groups typically do not provide payment or liability coverage. It is, therefore, incumbent on any physician who wishes to volunteer his or her services to check into a given situation before responding. Some such organizations, such as the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, require prospective volunteers to register and undergo training before they are allowed to serve.

Learn more about opportunities to volunteer medically during a disaster or other emergency, as well as about other aspects of disaster preparedness and response, from the *AAFP Preparedness Manual for Disasters and Public Health Emergencies*, online at <http://www.aafp.org/online/en/home/clinical/disasterprep/manual.mem.html> (Members Only).



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