

Chapter 3: Understanding the Community Planning Process

As home health care agency management begins to engage in emergency response planning, it will be necessary to understand existing emergency preparedness processes and programs in the community and how they work.

Command and Control

The issue of command and control is central to effective planning & response. Review your homecare agency's plan. Prepare to collaborate with groups that may represent competing institutional, financial, and professional. A pandemic influenza response plan should clearly assign responsibility to appropriate participants and provide details of the local incident command structure for a pandemic influenza. Partners in the planning and emergency response process, including representatives from home health care, need to be familiar with this structure.

-Many agencies have already been involved in test and table top exercises and have built relationships with their parishes' Offices of Emergency Preparedness. They are busy with response at this point, but the list of Louisiana's parish OEPs is at the following link: <http://www.ohsep.louisiana.gov/linkpages/parishpa.htm>

-Hospitals and nursing homes have had Designated Regional Coordinators (DRCs) for the past few years. Home Health has just activated a group of home health volunteers to participate in this effort. You'll hear more about and from them in the coming days.

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) was developed so that emergency responders from different jurisdictions and disciplines can work together better to respond to natural disasters and emergencies. The system provides a standardized incident command structure and nomenclature to enable all private sector, government, and nongovernment organizations to provide mutual aid and manage resources. Given that NIMS is used by offices of emergency management and may come into play to respond to a pandemic influenza outbreak, home health care agency staff should familiarize themselves with its structure and terminology.

RESOURCES

NIMS has a national training curriculum for public and private sectors on emergency planning and preparedness. For curriculum and other information about NIMS, go to <http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nims>.

The Medical Surge Capacity and Capability Handbook, designed to help medical and health systems coordinate with one another and integrate with fire service and law enforcement agencies, offers guidance in developing medical response that is consistent with NIMS. Go to http://www.hhs.gov/aspr/oepo/documents/mscc_handbook.html.

COMMUNICATION

Ideally, communication strategies and messages should be developed and rehearsed ahead of time as part of planning, and they should be centralized through the State's joint information center and local incident command systems. Clear pre-scripted messages, such as that the home is the "safe haven" in the event of a pandemic, should be developed for different scenarios with plans for ways they will be transmitted through official channels.

RESOURCE

For risk communication materials and resources, go to
<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/news/rcommunication.html>.

Coordinated communication is critical to diminishing the risks of negative outcomes such as panic, chaos, and hospital and emergency department crowding during an event as serious as an influenza pandemic. Clearly defined procedures are needed for rapid dissemination of pandemic information among home healthcare, emergency medical services, public health, 9-1-1 public safety answering points, and emergency management officials. This should include coordination with CDC's Health Alert Network.