

PREPARING FOR PANDEMIC INFLUENZA

CHAPTERS 5 AND 6

Chapter 5 Changes in Parameters of Patient Care

There will be many challenges for home health during a pandemic flu epidemic including new patient care issues:

- Will be higher acuities
- Early releases from hospitals
- Higher number of deaths at home

Other issues:

- A hospital's surge capacity
- Number of patients with pre-existing conditions
- Need for palliative care
- May be an increased need for patient information and resources

Telehealth technology can address health care worker shortages during this time. Telehealth may:

- Allow one nurse to monitor many patients
- Establish a basis for intervention/home visits
- Provide information to family members
- Improve outcomes through improved education, monitoring, and medication monitoring

Technologies that may be utilized during a pandemic flu outbreak:

- Remote vital sign monitoring
- Interactive voice response systems
- Video monitoring
- Web cameras and cell phones
- Digital photography
- Text messaging

Resources

Emergency Preparedness Checklist for Case Management and Home Care

<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/hhstmpl.asp?url=/content/hhs/phs/APC/preplanning.asp>

Chapter 6 Legal and Ethical Concerns

As we remember from experiences with Hurricanes Katrina and Rita that there will be legal and ethical concerns no matter what the type of disaster.

With the threat of a pandemic flu local declarations of emergency or public health emergency may be released by federal or state governments. The federal and state government declarations may operate independently.

Home health agencies must understand an altered legal environment during a public health emergency. Potential solutions should be considered in advance. Parameters may differ from state to state. Agencies should consult their state and local governments, HCLA, local planners, and their lawyers to learn how they may be affected. Issues to consider:

- Allocation of scarce resources
- Scope of practice
- Addressing medical personnel licensure requirements

- Reimbursement
- Human resource policies
- Worker's compensation
- Patient release policies
- Protection for at-risk populations
- Health care worker liability protections
- Patient abandonment
- Parameters and processes for public health declarations

Resources

Ethical Guidelines in Pandemic Influenza

<http://www.cdc.gov/od/science/phac/guidelinesPanFlu.htm>

Mass medical Care with Scarce Resources

<http://www.ahrq.gov/research/mce/>.

CONCLUSION

Several things come to mind when reading the actual Issues and Resources document and the chapter reviews. The home health care industry will serve as an essential component of surge capacity in the event of a pandemic influenza outbreak.

It is critical that home health care agencies are actively involved in planning and collaboration across all sectors of the health care continuum. The anticipated surge of patients will strain the home health care workforce. Strategies involving home-based care and monitoring technologies should be considered to expand the options for patient care during a pandemic.

Home health agencies should regularly review their Emergency Preparedness plans. HCLA's website will be a resource for up to date information along with agencies receiving email blasts with time sensitive information.