MDs Call for More Funding for Disaster Planning

BY MARY ELLEN SCHNEIDER
New York Bureau

Public health systems need more federal funding in order to respond to both day-to-day emergencies and also mass-casualty events, according to disaster preparedness recommendations that were released by a coalition of 18 major health organizations.

The coalition, which was led by the American Medical Association (AMA) and the American Public Health Association, issued a report with 53 recommendations that were aimed at leaders in medicine and government.

Some of the other coalition members included the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Emergency Physicians, and also the American College of Surgeons.

No one can predict the time, place, or magnitude of terrorist attacks. But there is no excuse for failing to plan responses to these mass casualty events.

The project was funded under a cooperative agreement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"The only thing we can probably predict with any certainty about terrorism attacks and other mass casualty events is this—we're not going to know the time, location, and magnitude in advance," Dr. Ronald M. Davis, president of the AMA, said at a press conference to release the report. "But we have no excuse if our responses aren't known in advance," he added.

The report identifies nine critical areas that require immediate action, including:

► Increased federal funding should be allocated for the purpose of expanding emergency medical, trauma care, and disaster health preparedness systems across the country.

► Governmental entities and health systems must develop and evaluate processes to ensure a return to readiness for routine health care and future mass casualty events following a disaster.

► Funding for economic recovery after a disaster needs to emphasize the reestablishment of public health and health care systems.

► The Institute of Medicine should perform a comprehensive study of health system surge capacity.

► Emergency and disaster preparedness must be integrated with public health and health care systems nationwide to provide effective emergency and trauma care.

► Public health and health care officials must participate directly in disaster preparedness planning, mitigation, response, and recovery operations.

► Health disaster communications and health information exchange networks must be fully integrated and interoperable at every level of government and health systems.

► The government, health systems, and all professional organizations should work together to develop and distribute information on the management of adult and pediatric patients in both day-to-day emergency situations as well as catastrophic events.

► Public health and health care responders must each be awarded adequate legal protections for providing care during a disaster. ■

The full text of the report is available online at www.ama-assn.org/go/disasterpreparedness.

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