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Phelps County Regional Medical Center and Medical Reserve Corps Respond to Emergency Disaster Drill

On April 24, 2008 Phelps County Regional Medical Center's Emergency Medical Services (EMS), Emergency Management Mass Causality Incident (MCI) Trailer and Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) responded to a mock Mass Causality (MASCAL) drill at Pathways.

The disaster scenario was that eleven tornadoes had been sighted in Missouri, with some of them touching down through out the Region I area. These tornadoes caused major damage with mass casualties from Laclede County to North Crawford County. The Pathways facility was set up as a mock 50 bed nursing home with 23 injured patients and 6 fatalities.

Normally with a mass causality event, Phelps County EMS would request other emergency medical services in the area to assist them in working the event. In this scenario there was no other EMS available to them. This caused the Phelps County EMS crew to request the Medical Reserve Corps to respond to Pathways and for the PCRMC's Emergency Management MCI Trailer to be deployed.

This drill was staged to assess the ability of the local Medical Reserve Corps, the hospital emergency management team and the hospital emergency medical services to work as a cohesive unit in emergency situations which create mass casualties.

Two ambulances were dispatched to Pathways, where the crews triaged the victims, who were played by MS&T students, community volunteers and hospital employees to determine the most urgent cases. The patients were triaged (grouped) according to colors. Red needing the immediate care, yellow needing delayed care and green needing the least care. The MRC volunteers assisted with setting up safe zones, transporting the victims to the safe zones and meeting the basic physical and psychological needs of those impacted by the tornado.

Terry Baker, the paramedic who led the EMS team, said of the MRC volunteers, "They were a big help. In this drill scenario, we were cut off from potential aid by other EMS departments due to the weather, so the volunteers really made it possible for us to handle many more patients. They did whatever we needed and did it efficiently." That attitude was backed up by Beverly Stewart, who is the volunteer coordinator for the local MRC team, "We had some concerns that our volunteers would have a hard time working effectively alongside the EMS people. We were very pleased that the two groups complemented each other so well."

After the one-and-a-half hour drill came to a close, Debbie Halinar, Infection Control-Safety Officer of the hospital met with MRC and hospital staff to review the strengths and weaknesses of the operation. "We have areas of improvement, which were identified in the drill" said Halinar. "However we can be proud of everyone who participated in this drill for our main objective of team building was accomplished. In participating in regular disaster drills, the hospital and our community are better prepared to face an actual disaster, should one occur." Regular drills include simulated natural disasters, bioterrorism events or major accidents.

According to Jodi Waltman, director of the health department, the MRC was developed locally to include some licensed medical professionals, from physicians to veterinarians to nurses and counselors. The largest group of volunteers, however, includes non-medical laypersons who want to be available to assist medical response in disaster situations and other health care challenges like flu vaccination clinics or large athletic events. If any one is interested in becoming a member of the Medical Reserve Corps, he or she should contact Beverly Stewart at the health department at 458-6010.