



National Association of State EMS Directors
National Association of EMS Physicians
American Public Health Association

Medical Groups Ensuring Terrorism Readiness

Atlanta, Georgia (October 22, 2001) - In a joint announcement at the annual conference of the American Public Health Association (APHA) in Atlanta, leaders from private and public sector emergency medical services (EMS) organizations today pledged to ensure that local EMS and public health agencies stand ready to respond to future acts of terrorism.

Leaders from the APHA, the National Association of EMS Physicians (NAEMSP), and the National Association of State EMS Directors (NASEMSD) gathered in a special conference session to sign a memorandum of understanding formalizing a joint effort to open lines of communication and support between local agencies and state and federal disaster resources.

Mass casualty incidents have long been a concern of EMS and public health agencies. "There was a time when mass casualty planning meant preparing for natural disasters or large scale transportation incidents, but the events last month underscore the critical need for communities to be ready for a broad range of deadly threats" explained Mohammad Akhter, Executive Director of the American Public Health Association.

"Your local EMS and public health agencies are the first line of defense against mass casualty events. It is imperative that our local EMS and public health agencies are capable of responding and aware of the federal and state resources that are available to them through such programs as the National Disaster Medical System, so that they can quickly funnel these services to their communities in a crisis situation" explained Dr. Richard Hunt, president of the National Association of EMS Physicians.

"EMS is the public health safety net, and it must be proactively included in response planning" stated Dia Gainor, President of the NASEMSD and EMS Bureau Chief for the state of Idaho. "Ambulance personnel should be used to augment surveillance efforts by reporting emerging patterns of patients and their symptoms to public health authorities."

Martin Singer, State EMS Director from New Hampshire and Chairman of the NASEMSD Domestic Preparedness Committee added, "The only way local health care officials will be able to keep up with a mass casualty situation is if EMS and public

health agencies are working hand-in-hand according to prearranged agreements and understandings”.

Over the past two years, EMS and public health officials met in a series of four national roundtables to develop strategies for improving collaboration at the local level. These deliberations, supported by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Health Resources and Services Administration, resulted in a list of recommendations for local agencies and a number of national level actions to foster collaboration. Dr. Ricardo Martinez, Former NHTSA Administrator and participant in the EMS and public health roundtables, stressed, “Last year during our roundtables, we proposed that collaboration between EMS and public health was a good idea. It is now an imperative.”

The EMS and public health leaders further stressed the need to ensure sufficient local health care capacity to handle a crisis situation without disrupting their critical ongoing community health care functions. Dr. Rick Hunt adds, “ A disaster situation can quickly drain scarce local resources, leaving the community without emergency care for ongoing trauma or medical emergencies such as motor vehicle crash injuries or cardiac arrests. We need to gear up capacity in many areas.”

The memorandum of understanding signed by these EMS and public health leaders today commits their organizations to bring their national leaderships together in a national forum to assess resource availability and ensure that their memberships are ready to effectively respond to local needs and engage with available resources.