

Access to Disaster Education

By Nancy Harker

Since the fall of 2001, academic medicine has undertaken a new commitment toward educating health care professionals in the preparation for, first response to, and coordination of large-scale disasters. Wright State's Department of Emergency Medicine, along with its community and statewide partners, are training and equipping health care professionals for any eventuality. They are developing a comprehensive educational opportunity for incident management that includes effective organization, resource and information management, timely training, and valuable collaborations between health care and security forces during mass casualty incidences.

As local physicians seek ways to be involved and prepared, they are being trained at sessions developed by the United States Department of Homeland Security, in conjunction with the Medical College of Georgia and the University of Georgia. This training was developed to ensure that all levels of security and health care professionals are taught a nationally standardized program of disaster relief. The programs include Basic Disaster Life Support (BDLS®) and Advanced Disaster Life Support (ADLS®), with more targeted training, CORE® Disaster Life Support and CORE-D Core Decontamination Life Support, in the process of development.

Last spring the State of Ohio held its first BDLS® and ADLS® training sessions, which were organized and sponsored through the Department of Emergency Medicine and held on Wright State's campus. Attended by health care professionals from around the state, the four days of training used an all hazards approach to education. The BDLS® training program included two days of lectures and practical exercises to help develop a common approach and language through all disciplines, thereby improving the coordination during public health

emergencies. The BDLS® training covers the disaster paradigm: natural disasters, explosive events, nuclear and radiological weapon attacks, biological events, chemical events, the public health system, and the psychosocial aspects of disasters.

The ADLS® course consisted of an additional two days of small group interactive sessions that cover MASS triage, PPE and decontamination, and disaster skills in disaster scenarios. An instructional Human Patient Simulator was used to train professionals in the detection, prophylaxis, and treatment under conditions that may occur.

Mark Gebhart, M.D., assistant professor of emergency medicine at Wright State University School of Medicine, says, “The training BDLS® and ADLS® provides is an invaluable resource for all levels of health care professionals who want to ensure that they are thoroughly prepared for action in the case of a bioterrorist, chemical, or other disastrous event.”

“This component of community service is essential to the success of any preparedness planning. Individuals who respond to a disaster situation must have some training and a basic understanding of the process to be of assistance. Otherwise, the need for on-site education may become a drain on resources at a time when they are most necessary,” explains Glenn Hamilton, M.D., chair and professor of the Department of Emergency Medicine. “These situations are not for everyone, and those who commit in advance demonstrate their willingness to be of real assistance when the time comes.”

One decisive conclusion that has come from planning and training sessions is the necessity of having a medical director at the scene after a disaster event and at the operations center command. William (Randy) Marriott, M.D., assistant clinical professor of emergency medicine, and James E. Brown, Jr., M.D., assistant professor of emergency medicine and director of the Emergency Medicine Residency Program, along with Dr. Gebhart, are in the

process of devising an on-call schedule in their department for just such an eventuality in our area.

“Currently, the best regional resource for learning this information is through the Department of Emergency Medicine and the Combined Health District of Montgomery County,” states Dr. Hamilton. “Taking this role in our community for training professionals disaster response is an important educational opportunity for all members of the health professions community,” adds Dr. Gebhart.

For more information or to become involved, contact Wright State University Department of Emergency Medicine at (937) 395-8839.