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GOOD STORY

The Illinois Mobile Emergency Response Team

SUMMARY

The Illinois Mobile Emergency Response Team (IMERT) is a volunteer program that trains emergency medical personnel to respond to mass casualty incidents (MCIs). IMERT teams are deployed to MCIs, including those involving weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

BACKGROUND

The IMERT program was created in the late 1990s by a multi-disciplinary group composed of emergency physicians, nurses, emergency medical technicians (EMTs), and members of the Division of Emergency Medical Services of the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH). The group's charter was to evaluate the level of awareness and preparedness of emergency department personnel to respond to a large-scale incident. They focused on the educational needs of these personnel. During this process, the group realized that Illinois needed a more systematic approach to responding to a large-scale catastrophe including:

- Organized emergency medical response protocols
- Formalized communications network
- Designated, specially prepared medical responders

The group received a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to establish a program to recruit, educate, and organize IMERT volunteers.

GOALS

IMERT teams assist Illinois in state-declared disasters by providing treatment to casualties for up to seventy-two hours or until federal support arrives. It specifically trains physicians and nurses with trauma or emergency medicine backgrounds to enable them to respond to MCIs that may involve WMD.

DESCRIPTION

Program Organization

IMERTEC

IMERT is directed by the IMERT Executive Council (IMERTEC). The Council is co-chaired by an emergency physician from Cook County Hospital and the Chief of the Division of Emergency Medical Services for the State of Illinois. IMERTEC's ten members include emergency physicians, nurses, and paramedics with leadership experience in emergency medical services and disaster planning, as well as some individuals with varying expertise in the fields of domestic preparedness and counterterrorism. Additionally, advisors from governmental agencies, such as the Illinois Department of Public Health, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the U.S. Public Health Service also sit on IMERTEC.

IMERTEC meets monthly to evaluate policies, training courses, new ideas, recruitment and retention, and to assess any recent deployments. Additionally, the Council discusses education ideas and updates, especially regarding WMD education, as well as reviewing medical guidelines in the field.

Volunteers

IMERT volunteers are organized into teams of four or five people consisting of an emergency or trauma physician, an emergency or trauma nurse, a paramedic, and one or two other medical personnel who are, at a minimum, licensed as EMTs.

The teams are organized based on four regions in Illinois—Southern Illinois, Central Illinois, Northern Illinois, and Chicago. Currently, there are approximately 600 approved IMERT volunteers, who support teams in each of the four areas. As of December 2004, there will be total of eight teams—two in each area.

Volunteer Recruiting and Requirements

IMERT volunteers are recruited through various professional emergency medical associations, conferences, word of mouth, and on the website (www.imert.org). Volunteers must fill out an application form (<http://www.imert.org/join/application/application.pdf>) and meet the following requirements:

- Be at least 18 years old;
- Be a citizen or permanent resident of the United States;
- Maintain a current and unrestricted license, certification, or registration as required by the Team position;
- Be able to report to a pre-designated assembly point within four hours;
- Be physically fit and capable of working in a disaster event environment;
- Maintain a text capable messaging device (pager or cell phone) to receive activation notifications when on call;
- Have previous training in the Incident Command System;
- Have a minimum of four hours of WMD recognition and treatment education;
- Attend scheduled mandatory continuing education sessions and team meetings;
- Be familiar with the IMERT code of conduct and other policies; and
- Complete an IMERT training program.

Additionally, there are specific requirements for each position on a Team (<http://www.imert.org/join/positiondesc.asp>):

- IMERT Leader—Medical Supervisor: responsible for supervising all medical care provided by the team;
- IMERT Nurse: responsible for assisting with medical care of decontaminated victims;
- IMERT Advance Life Support (ALS) Specialist: responsible for assisting the Team Leader in providing ALS medical care; and
- IMERT Basic Life Support (BLS) Specialist: responsible for assisting the Team Leader in providing BLS medical care.

IMERTEC is in the process of developing team positions for dentists, physician assistants, and allied health professionals.

Training

Members of IMERTEC are called on to assist with the actual training. In order to qualify for IMERT, volunteers must complete a program that includes courses on WMD, MCIs, and incident command training. Volunteers are also required to attend an all day IMERT "Boot

Camp” training session. This session includes an outline of IMERT policies and procedures, as well as “skill stations” where volunteers can apply practical skills learned during training. IMERT training boot camps and WMD training programs are held throughout Illinois.

Curriculum

The IMERT training course provides a general overview of IMERT protocols and educates volunteers about equipment and communications requirements. The day-long session examines policies, procedures, and state medical plan response issues; breakout skill stations give volunteers the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities. The curriculum includes:

- Uniforms and identification badges: Volunteers receive their identification badges and uniforms and are familiarized with the requirements for use.
- Equipment: Details the types of equipment for use during an MCI. Specifically, this section demonstrates new equipment and discusses the equipment specifics for scene response.
- Call schedule and response: Covers information regarding the call schedule, how the call schedule is set, maintaining and using pagers, and responding to incidents.
- Review of team structure: Provides an overview of the structure of each IMERT team and the roles played by each member. Additionally, it discusses how IMERT relates to the state medical disaster plan.
- Education and training: Focuses on the requirements for each IMERT volunteer including mandatory training sessions, continuing education, hours, and drills.
- Skill stations: Provides a practical application of information learned during the training course. Volunteers are required to participate in all stations. The mini-sessions focus on:
 - Equipment use
 - Cook Pneumothorax kits
 - Mark One Auto Injectors
 - Morgan Eye Wash kits
 - Multi-Lumen Airways
 - Portable Radios
 - Portable ventilators
 - V-Vac Suction
 - HazMat familiarization
 - Rapid assessment
 - Triage

Code of Conduct

All IMERT volunteers must agree to the following code of conduct:

- No discussion of any patient care issues;
- No taking pictures at a scene unless approved;
- No substance abuse;
- Volunteers may wear their IMERT uniform and badges only at approved times; and
- Unethical behavior will not be tolerated.

To complete their training, all IMERT volunteers are required to sign a statement agreeing to these regulations.

Approved Volunteers

The Illinois Department of Public Health maintains a database of approved volunteers who have successfully completed the IMERT training program. Only the Illinois State Department of Public Health and the IMERT support staff, who are housed at the Illinois College of Emergency Physicians office, have access to this information.

Maintaining IMERT Status

After becoming an approved IMERT volunteer, individuals are required to attend two training sessions/drills a year to maintain their status as an active IMERT member. Volunteers are required to be on call for two weeks every three to six months. The call schedule is flexible and based around each individual's schedule. Each Monday, at the start of a call period, a test page goes out to all team members and administrators on call for a particular IMERT team.

Continuing education credits (CEUs) are awarded to any emergency medical technician for IMERT training. Additionally, IMERT volunteers can earn CEUs for time spent on-call and for time spent at an incident.

Mobilization

Volunteers are activated via a text receiving wireless device, such as a cellular phone, pager, or a personal digital assistant (PDA). IMERT has established transportation assistance (both ground and air) to aid team members in getting to disaster sites. IMERT volunteers have a designated pick-up location in each region and they must be able to reach that location in under three hours. From there, vans shuttle volunteers to the airport, or to a disaster site.

All IMERT volunteers must carry their IMERT identification badge, which includes their name, a picture of the Illinois State seal, and the expiration date. The IDPH is considering adding bar codes to the badge that will provide basic information on each volunteer's medical history.

IMERT in the Field

Once deployed, IMERT volunteers may be providing treatment for casualties for up to seventy-two hours, until federal help arrives, or an incident comes to an end. IMERT teams are responsible for providing necessary medical care, including patient classification, triage, on-site treatment, and patient reclassification. There are several operational roles on each team:

- The physician acts as the IMERT Leader and Medical Supervisor. He/she provides care to critically injured victims and is also responsible for supervising all medical care provided by the team. In addition, the IMERT Leader reports directly to the Incident Commander (IC) and, when requested by the IC, advises local public health agencies on medical issues.
- The nurse is responsible for aiding with the medical care of decontaminated victims and reports to the IMERT Leader. Additionally, he/she monitors the health of Team members and ensures that the records of both patients and Team members are complete and accurate.

- Other Team members, including the Advanced Life Support (ALS) and Basic Life Support (BLS) specialists, are responsible for assisting the IMERT Leader in providing needed medical care to decontaminated victims.

IMERT and TOPOFF2

In addition to participating in several other regional disaster drills, IMERT volunteers were used during the Top Officials 2 (TOPOFF2) exercise held in Chicago in May 2003. The Illinois Department of Public Health deployed 98 IMERT volunteers over a period of three days. They performed medical triage and simulated treatment at the Midway Airport crash site, as well as participated in exercises run by the Illinois State Police.

The exercise demonstrated a need for clearer communications between IMERT and IDPH as well as identified the need for a more coherent IMERT dispatch.

Links

- IMERT: <http://www.imert.org>
- Illinois Homeland Security: <http://www.illinois.gov/security/ittf/terrorismreport12.htm>
- National Domestic Preparedness Office Newsletter: *LLIS.gov* ID# [13445](#)

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