

SNAPSHOT OF EMERGENCY SURGE CAPACITY IN MINNEAPOLIS

At 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 25, 2008, the majority staff of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform surveyed 34 Level I trauma centers in seven cities, including the Minneapolis, Minnesota area.¹ Level I trauma centers are hospitals that have the staff and facilities to offer the most comprehensive, around-the-clock trauma care. This snapshot survey found that there was little or no emergency surge capacity — the ability to handle a sudden influx of casualties — in the Level I trauma centers in any of the seven cities.

One of the two Level I trauma centers that serve over three million residents in the Minneapolis area participated in the survey. Minneapolis will be the site of the 2008 Republican National Convention.

The survey assessed the capacity of Hennepin County Medical Center, the Level I trauma center in Minneapolis to respond to a terrorist bombing of a size similar to the 2004 Madrid bombing. According to the Centers on Disease Control and Prevention, the 2004 Madrid bombing, in which over 2,000 were injured and more than 270 patients were taken to one hospital within 2.5 hours, is an appropriate standard for assessing mass casualty preparedness.²

The survey found that on Tuesday, March 25, 2008, at 4:30 p.m. local time:

- **The emergency room in the Level I trauma center surveyed in Minneapolis was operating at 91% capacity.** When an emergency room reaches “capacity,” new patients can be accommodated only in overflow spaces, such as hallways, waiting rooms, or administrative offices. At the time of the survey, the emergency room at Hennepin County was operating at 91% capacity.
- **The total number of available treatment spaces in the emergency room of the Level I trauma center surveyed in Minneapolis was insufficient to respond to a Madrid event.** After the Madrid attack, 270 victims were transported to one hospital for emergency care. The emergency room of the Level I trauma center surveyed in Minneapolis did not have the capacity to handle the volume of victims treated at one Madrid hospital. The emergency room in the Level I trauma center in Minneapolis had only five available treatment spaces, less than 2% of the capacity needed at one hospital in Madrid on the day of the bombing.

Surge capacity depends on more than sufficient space in the emergency room. A hospital must also be able to provide sufficient critical care resources, such as space in intensive care units, and inpatient beds. If these beds are not available, patients who require hospitalization are frequently “boarded” in the emergency room until they can be moved to an intensive care unit or inpatient

¹ Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Majority Staff, *Emergency Surge Capacity: The Failure to Prepare for the “Predictable Surprise”* (May 5, 2008). The other cities are New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington, D.C., Houston, and Denver.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. *In a Moment's Notice: Surge Capacity for Terrorist Bombings* (Apr. 2007).

bed. On the day of the survey, there were such severe shortages of critical care and inpatient beds that many of the hospitals we surveyed were already “boarding” admitted patients in their emergency room. The survey found:

- **The Level I trauma center surveyed in Minneapolis did not have enough critical care capacity available to treat the casualties from a Madrid event.** After the Madrid attack, 29 patients arrived at one hospital in critical condition. The Level I trauma center surveyed in Minneapolis did not have the critical care capacity to handle this volume of severely injured victims. The trauma center surveyed had only three intensive care unit beds available.
- **None of the Level I trauma centers had a sufficient number of regular inpatient beds available to absorb the casualties from a Madrid event.** In Madrid, 89 casualties required admission to a hospital bed. No Level I trauma center surveyed had enough beds available to accommodate a surge of this size. The Level I trauma center in Minneapolis had only 29 beds available.

After conducting the “snapshot” survey on March 25 at 4:30 p.m., the Committee staff sent follow-up questionnaires to the hospitals surveyed. Twenty-three of the hospitals responded to the questionnaire. Their responses indicate that the level of emergency care they can provide is likely to be further compromised by three new Medicaid regulations, the first of which takes effect on May 26, 2008. According to these hospitals, the new Medicaid regulations will reduce federal payments to their facilities by \$623 million per year. If the states choose to withdraw their matching funds, the hospitals could face a reduction of about \$1.2 billion. The hospitals told the Committee that these funding cuts will force them “to significantly reduce services” in the future and that “loss of resources of this magnitude inevitably will lead to curtailing of critical health care safety net services such as emergency, trauma, burn, HIV/AIDS, neonatology, asthma care, diabetes care, and many others.”