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Family Assistance Centers: On-Site Medical Support

SUMMARY

Family Assistance Centers (FACs) should have on-site medical support during a mass casualty incident (MCI).

DESCRIPTION

The fire that destroyed the Station Club in Warwick, Rhode Island, on February 20, 2003, resulted in 96 deaths and more than 200 injuries. The next morning, a FAC was established to meet the immediate needs of victims and their families. Emergency medical services (EMS) personnel from the Warwick Fire Department were originally tasked with handling medical emergencies at the FAC. However, they were too exhausted from treating fire victims and were soon replaced by Disaster Medical Assistance Team (DMAT) personnel.

While at the FAC, DMAT physicians worked with nurses and paramedics to treat family members with headaches, emotional distress, and minor maladies. Only one such person, a pregnant woman experiencing abdominal pain, required transportation to a hospital. The presence of DMAT personnel at the FAC helped free ambulances for transporting critical patients to hospitals. Relatives experiencing stress-related medical problems could also keep vigil for loved ones without having to leave the FAC.

FACs should have on-site medical support during a MCI. By treating distressed relatives on site, experienced doctors and nurses can help keep ambulances free for critical patients. Physicians experienced in shelter operations may be particularly well prepared to offer such support.

CITATION

Titan Systems Corporation. *Rhode Island: The Station Club Fire After-Action Report: State, Local, and Federal Government and the Private Sector*. 13 July 2004. (LLIS.gov ID# 10806)

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