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GOOD STORY

Oklahoma City-County Health Department's System for Dispensing Strategic National Stockpile Materials to Immobile Populations

SUMMARY

The Oklahoma City-County Health Department (OKCCHD) developed a system to distribute Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) pharmaceuticals to individuals unable to travel to local points of dispensing (POD). OKCCHD's system ensures that the county's most vulnerable populations receive the pharmaceuticals and supplies they need during SNS distribution.

BACKGROUND

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Strategic National Stockpile ensures the availability and rapid deployment of pharmaceuticals and other medical supplies during public health emergencies. When requested, the CDC will deliver pre-staged SNS packages of supplies to a state's Receipt, Storage, and Staging (RSS) site. States are then responsible for moving materials from the RSS site to local PODs for distribution to the general population.

In June 2004, the OKCCHD SNS coordinator identified a critical gap in the department's planning for SNS distribution. OKCCHD's plan required individuals to report to PODs to receive SNS antibiotics or vaccines. This plan did not accommodate county residents who were unable to travel due to illness, physical frailty, advanced age, or incarceration. The SNS Coordinator estimated that 250,000 residents, or approximately 37 percent of the county's total population, would be unable to reach a dispensing site in the event of a public health emergency.

To close this gap, the SNS Coordinator directed the Department's Senior Services Division (SSD) to develop a plan for dispensing SNS pharmaceuticals to sheltered-in-place (SIPS) populations. The SNS coordinator selected SSD for this task because the division was familiar with the challenges of delivering health services to the county's elderly residents who make up a large percentage of the local SIPS community.

GOALS

The OKCCHD distribution system allows the quick and efficient distribution of SNS pharmaceuticals to the county's SIPS population during a public health emergency. The system expedites the distribution and dispensing process while minimizing staffing and expenses.

DESCRIPTION

During SNS distribution operations, OKCCHD is responsible for distributing pharmaceuticals to all members of the county SIPS community. This community is comprised of:

- **Group housing residents:** Individuals who reside in group housing where they receive supervision, assistance from facility staff, or long-term medical care. Examples include nursing homes, assisted living facilities, group homes for the physically and mentally challenged, substance abuse facilities, and psychiatric care facilities. Many group housing facilities do not have the vehicles or staff to transport their residents quickly to an operational dispensing site.
- **Incarcerated individuals:** Individuals detained in prisons, half-way houses, and juvenile facilities.
- **Home-bound individuals:** Individuals living in private residences who are unable to leave their homes due to physical or mental illness, disability, or advanced age. Most of these people require some level of support from relatives, friends, or neighbors, and many receive medical care in their homes.

The SSD had to first identify these communities to ensure that the county's SIPS community would receive SNS pharmaceuticals and supplies in a public health emergency. It next established a plan for dedicating a SIPS distribution point accessible to the personnel who would be delivering supplies to group housing and incarcerated individuals. Lastly, SSD devised a method for reaching home-bound populations.

Engaging SIPS Communities

The SSD began identifying group housing residents and incarcerated individuals in county facilities through hard copy and online directories in July 2004. SSD staff members then contacted each facility to provide background information on the SNS and to explain the department's distribution plans. The SSD also worked with facility administrators to determine the pharmaceutical needs of each facility's residents, staff members, and their immediate families. It helped facilities pre-identify the staff members who would be responsible for picking up these pharmaceuticals during SNS distribution. SSD staff then created a comprehensive database of these facilities' needs.

SSD personnel next contacted the county's neighborhood associations to request help in identifying and communicating with home-bound populations. The SSD was concerned that many of these individuals would be reluctant to talk with strangers. Neighborhood associations, which are active and well trusted in many Oklahoma County communities, provided an important link to this population. The associations agreed that they would supply SSD with information on home-bound residents during an SNS distribution period. They requested, however, that SSD allow them to keep county residents' personal addresses and contact information confidential until SNS activation.

Dedicating a SIPS Distribution Site

In planning for SNS distribution, SSD staff saw the need for a dedicated SIPS distribution site. Staff members identified three possible sites across the county. All three sites share certain characteristics, including at least 2,000 square feet of open internal space, at least one loading dock for incoming and outgoing deliveries, perimeter fencing, and controlled access points.

During a period of SNS distribution, the SSD director will select a dedicated SIPS distribution site from one of the three pre-identified sites. SSD staff members then activate the chosen site, begin operations, and contact the RSS site to request shipment of SNS materials to the SIPS site. Sheriff's deputies assigned to the selected SIPS distribution site check the OKCCHD-issued badges of all individuals picking up pharmaceuticals for a SIPS housing facility or prison.

Distribution to SIPS Housing Facilities and Home-Bound Individuals

The SSD sends a faxed notification of distribution operations to all registered SIPS group housing and incarceration facilities once the SIPS distribution site is operating. The fax provides the location of the SIPS distribution site and the time the SIPS facility will begin distributing pharmaceuticals. Facilities call the SIPS site to acknowledge receipt of the fax and then dispatch their authorized representative to pick up pharmaceuticals. The SSD expects to provide pharmaceuticals to 25 facility representatives per hour.

Once facility distribution is complete, distribution to home-bound residents begins. SIPS site staff members contact local neighborhood associations to obtain the addresses of home-bound individuals. SIPS staff members then form several “strike teams” of two to three people who travel to private residences to administer vaccines, antibiotics, or other medications. The strike teams are composed of the same staff members who distribute pharmaceuticals at the SIPS distribution site. This allows SSD to conduct the entire distribution process with only 10 to 15 department staff members and in approximately 48 to 72 hours.

Outreach, Training, and Drills

SSD staff conducts ongoing outreach seminars, training sessions, and period drills for SIPS facility representatives and staff. These measures are intended to ensure the ongoing readiness of SSD and county SIPS facilities for an SNS distribution operation.

- **Outreach seminars:** Every 3 to 4 months, SSD conducts a voluntary outreach seminar for administrators and staff members at SIPS housing facilities, prisons, and neighborhood associations. SSD instructors provide an overview of the SNS and the department’s SIPS distribution plans. The seminars also provide SIPS facility staff members with the opportunity to ask questions and to voice concerns.
- **Training:** SSD staff trains medical personnel at SIPS facilities on how to administer smallpox inoculations in the event of a smallpox vaccination campaign. The smallpox vaccine requires a special bifurcated needle and an injection technique that many facility doctors, nurses, and other medical care providers do not have experience with.
- **Drills:** Regular SSD-led drills test the distribution system’s communication components. During drills, SSD sends a test notification fax to all registered group housing facilities, jails, and prisons, prompting them to dispatch their pre-assigned staff member to pick up pharmaceuticals for the facility. Each facility then contacts SSD to confirm that it received the fax and has dispatched staff to the SIPS distribution site.

REQUIREMENTS

Keys to Success Cooperation

The SSD system for distributing SNS materials to SIPS communities relies on the cooperation of SIPS housing facilities and neighborhood associations. Staff at SIPS facilities must be willing and able to pick up, transport, and dispense pharmaceuticals to their own residents. Local neighborhood associations must be similarly willing to serve as liaisons between SSD and home-bound individuals. The SSD ensures that it will provide SNS pharmaceuticals to facilities and directly to homebound individuals in exchange for this cooperation. This arrangement allows the SIPS staff to dispense materials to SIPS populations using a minimum of OKCCHD’s own resources.

Outreach

The success of the system further depends on active coordination and communication between SSD and the SIPS housing facilities. The SSD's initial outreach effort to the county's SIPS facilities established direct communication between SSD and facility staff, while the ongoing outreach efforts, training, and drills maintain these strong ties. The exhaustive efforts of the SSD staff to identify facilities housing SIPS populations has resulted in near universal participation of the county's SIPS facilities.

Resources

The SSD developed and implemented the SIPS distribution system by drawing upon existing SSD resources, staff, and facilities. Three SSD staff members handle all of the planning, outreach, and training. During distribution operations, OKCCHD facilities, staff, and vehicles are used to distribute materials. The system also uses commercial off-the-shelf software to maintain the facility database and to send faxes to SIPS housing facilities.

Links

Oklahoma City County Department of Health
<http://www.cchdoc.com/>

CITATIONS

Baldwin, Mary. Program Associate, Oklahoma City-County Health Department, Senior Services Division. Interview with *Lessons Learned Information Sharing*, 05 May 2005.

Dayton, Nancy. Program Associate, Oklahoma City-County Health Department, Senior Services Division. Interview with *Lessons Learned Information Sharing*, 05 May 2005.

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