

RELATED TERMS

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PRIMARY DISCIPLINES

- Emergency Management
- Healthcare

PRACTICE NOTE

Disabilities and Special Needs: Duval County, Florida, Health Department's "Adopt-a-Shelter" Program in Florida

PRACTICE

The Duval County Health Department in Florida developed an "Adopt-a-Shelter" program in which each local hospital provides staff members and medical supplies to a special needs shelter during an emergency.

DESCRIPTION

Florida's Duval County Health Department (DCHD) is responsible for establishing and staffing special needs shelters in an evacuation. DCHD maintains special needs shelters at five local facilities, three of which share space with American Red Cross general population shelters during an emergency.

In 1998, DCHD's special needs shelter coordinator, who works within the Office of Emergency Preparedness and Response, realized that DCHD's limited nursing personnel could not sufficiently staff all five special needs shelters. She also recognized that the shelters needed to provide residents with a higher level of care and more expertise than DCHD nurses could provide. At that time, the special needs shelter coordinator convened a meeting with representatives from each of the five local hospitals. She asked the hospitals to provide hospital nurses, health support technicians, respiratory technicians, physicians, and basic medical supplies to an "adopted" special needs shelter when they are operational. All five hospitals agreed to adopt a shelter.



DCHD's Emergency Preparedness Office helps the community plan for and respond to a public health emergency.

DCHD's special needs shelter coordinator established a plan with the hospitals to request personnel and supplies. When a disaster is imminent, the special needs shelter coordinator notifies the designated special needs contact at each hospital and requests staffing. The hospital then sends staff members to its adopted shelter. In support of the shelter, all the pre-purchased supplies are delivered to the shelter. These supplies sustain the shelter for the first 72 hours. At the special needs shelter, hospital staff work under DCHD staff members, who act as team leaders in different areas such as health and medical coordination, logistics, and critical incident stress management.

In 2004, Duval County had to open special needs shelters for the first time since the Adopt-a-Shelter program's inception. Hospitals succeeded at providing staff and medical supplies to their respective shelters. The experience also revealed lessons learned and areas for

improving special needs shelter coordination, which DCHD has integrated into its plans to facilitate future operations.

Since the program's inception, representatives from all participating hospitals meet monthly with the special needs shelter coordinator and other shelter partners such as ambulance services, disability advocacy organizations, the Office of Elder Affairs, and the military. These monthly meetings provide a forum for the participants to discuss current issues, to plan for the next hurricane season, and to determine what has and has not worked well in past incidents.

CITATIONS

Barnett, Kathy. Special Needs Shelter Coordinator, Duval County Health Department. Interview with *Lessons Learned Information Sharing*, 12 Jul 2007.

Frieden, Lex. *Saving Lives: Including People with Disabilities in Emergency Planning*. National Council on Disability. 15 Apr 2005.

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