from the President



As a result of the events of Sept. 11, and the ensuing biological events of the past few weeks, the American public is now living in an unprecedented time. These issues are some that have never been faced by U.S. citizens, and understandably, are of concern.

Leading physicians and scientists throughout the Texas Medical Center institutions are working together to ensure the safety of all Houstonians. They are experts on infectious disease, and emergency and internal medicine issues. They have the knowledge and technology needed to meet a challenge like this. One of these Texas Medical Center leaders, Dr. Ralph Feigin, president and CEO of Baylor College of Medicine, was recently chosen by Houston Mayor Lee P. Brown to chair the Medical Advisory Steering Committee of the city of Houston Medical Strike Team, part of the Houston Task Force on Terrorism, and more than 150 other physicians and scientists are contributing to this effort.

The committee has been working hard to ensure the safety of all Houston residents, by coordinating efforts to prepare, should this type of activity occur in our city, and to define the role of health care providers, should the need arise.

Hospitals throughout the TMC and the entire Houston area are preparing, making sure that they have access to needed drugs and chemical antidotes to treat patients, and are learning and preparing how to handle patients who have come in contact with any chemical or biological agents. This includes learning to decontaminate affected patients while keeping the rest of the hospital environment sterile. Drills have been, and continue to be, carried out to ensure that all personnel understand the protocol to safely care for patients under these types of circumstances.

One of the Medical Advisory Steering Committee activities has been to work on an emergency medical plan that can be stored on pocket-sized hand-held devices that physicians can access in the event of an emergency. On the chance that cellular lines are jammed and land phone lines are down, the doctors can access the information needed to correctly diagnose and treat patients with biological or chemical exposure.

Houston is also fortunate to have some very knowledgeable people on its Houston Fire Department Hazardous Materials Team. Because of the large petrochemical industry presence here, they are used to handling hazardous chemicals on a daily basis. Of its type, this team is the largest and most active in the nation.

The 42 institutions that make up the Texas Medical Center are on high alert, and should a situation arise here, the diagnostic abilities of the TMC's health care professionals could respond in a rapid way, so as to minimize any potential exposures, illnesses or casualties to the general public.

As long as morale remains strong and people stay united within the city, state and country, our sprit will not be broken. Fear must not weaken our society, and the way out of this situation is to put the issues into perspective. The chance of there being a problem is remote, at best.

We in the Texas Medical Center are confident that Houston is among the major U.S. cities most prepared to handle terrorism. It is our hope that Houston will be a prototype of how other cities might be prepared to respond to events of this type.

NOTE – Other Texas Medical Center and community leaders sitting on the Medical Advisory Steering Committee are: Dr. Steven B. Greenberg, associate chief of staff at Harris-Ben Taub General Hospital and associate chairman in the Department of Medicine, Baylor College of Medicine; Dr. Kenneth L. Mattox, chief of staff at Harris-Ben Taub and vice chairman in the Department of Surgery at Baylor; Dr. Jeffrey R. Starke, chief of pediatrics at Harris-Ben Taub and associate professor of Pediatrics at Baylor; Dr. S. Ward Casscells, interim vice president for biotechnology and the John Edward Tyson Distinguished Professor of Medicine at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston; Dr. James H. "Red" Duke, professor of surgery at The University of Texas Medical School at Houston and J.B. Holmes Professor of Clinical Sciences at The UT-Houston Health Science Center; Dr. Carlos Hamilton, vice president and special advisor to the president at The UT-Houston Health Science Center; Dr. James T. Willerson, president of The UT-Houston Health Science Center; Dr. Herbert L. DuPont, chief of internal medicine at St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital; Dr. John Mendelsohn, president of The University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center; Dr. Edward J. Septimus, medical director of infectious diseases and occupational health at Memorial Hermann Healthcare System; Dr. David E. Persse, director of the city of Houston Emergency Medical Services; and Dr. Mary des Vignes-Kendrick, director of the Houston Health and Human Services Department.

Dr. Richard E. Wainerdi is president of the Texas Medical Center and publisher/editor of the Texas Medical Center News.

Free Crisis-Counseling Services Available to Those Affected by Allison

Help is still available for disaster-related stress. The Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Texas Department of Mental Health/Mental Retardation continue to partner to provide crisis-counseling services for those affected by Tropical Storm Allison.

"Stress is a normal, common and most often, a temporary response following a disaster," said Scott Wells, federal coordinating officer for FEMA. "We urge people who continue to feel depressed, angry, frustrated or overwhelmed by the Allison disaster to seek help."

Crisis counseling helps Allison survivors recognize normal stress reactions and emotions caused or aggravated by the recent disaster. The counseling helps victims gain emotional control and can provide simple steps to help individuals cope, including stress management techniques for both adults and children.

"Many individuals who go through a disaster, experience some form of lingering stress related to the incident," said State Coordinating Officer Duke Mazurek. "We want Allison victims to know that they can count on help with regaining their emotional well being."

Individuals desiring additional information on crisis counseling are invited to call the following:

Harris County – Team Leader: Judith Onisiforou, (713) 970-3059, (713) 970-3054 - Fax
Physical address: Northside Family Resources Center, 330 N. Beltway East, Houston 77060
Mailing address: 7011 Southwest Freeway, Houston 77074

Gulf Coast – Team Leader: Tammy Brasel, (281) 482-4805, 281-482-6657 – Fax
4650 Dixie Farm Road, Pearland 77581

Spindletop – Team Leader: Joanne Roper, (409) 839-1043, (409) 839-2269 – Fax
2750 South 8th Street, Beaumont 77701

Conroe – Team Leader: Jason Herring, (832) 513-4424, 281-877-8754 – Fax
(Located in north Houston, pending lease space in Montgomery County)

In the remaining 20 counties, individuals can call the local mental health center crisis hotline located in the telephone book.

Daniel M. Thompson, director of the Disaster Assistance Program Medical Services, said, "Texas Department of Mental Health/Mental Retardation staff members are trained to offer immediate help, and in more than 85 percent of situations, the help can be provided at the home of the person seeking assistance." ■

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