

The Physician's Role in a Disaster

Our Place in the Community is Greater Than Just in our Offices

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Los Angeles County has one of the most sophisticated disaster systems of any county in the United States. There is one weak link that we need to strengthen, however. The physician community is ill trained and poorly equipped for the type of event we can expect here. We know there are earthquakes coming. There are train and other vehicle accidents. We are on the terrorist's radar. Yet few outside of the emergency medicine specialty prepare.

There are practical reasons why. Most of us are dependent on offices that have no emergency power and we do not keep redundant tools of our trade and supplies at home. In fact, few physicians even have first aid kits in their cars. We need to anticipate where and how we may be needed. We need to plan on how we can be of the most value to our community.

And we must train. In spite of free training programs in medical emergency preparedness, sponsored by FEMA and our county health department, few of us take classes in dealing with the type of catastrophic event we know is coming. We need to learn field-level care, how to deal with crush and blast victims, and how to deal with the emotional issues of patients, their loved ones, our co-workers, and ourselves. In reality, this is some of the most interesting CME you can imagine. It can help you save friends, family, and others in the community.

We have a community of key players in a disaster. We need to train and equip ourselves. Our place in the community is so much greater than just our office and hospital work.

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