

# COURAGE TO CARE

A Health Campaign of Uniformed Services University, [www.usuhs.edu](http://www.usuhs.edu), and the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, Bethesda, Maryland, [www.CSTSonline.org](http://www.CSTSonline.org)

## THE HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF DISASTERS AND EVACUATION

### *What Patients Need to Know to Prepare*

This installment of Courage to Care is designed to facilitate doctor-patient dialogue around the health implications of exposure to disasters, especially those that require the need for evacuation. The talking points below can help you ask the questions that will help your patients assess, prepare for and respond to an evacuation, and do so in a way that is responsive to their unique health needs.

There is also a separate fact sheet for individuals and families that your office can download and distribute in your waiting area or clinic. In addition, you may disseminate this electronically to colleagues, and/or put

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it on your own organization's website to enhance your health outreach in the community.

On the reverse side is a box to customize local contact information and health resources useful during disasters.

As a healthcare provider to our Uniformed Services, your care impacts not just your patients and their families,

but our national security, our national defense and our nation's health. The aftermath of major disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina, provide valuable opportunities to reinforce important public health measures such as preparedness and evacuation.

#### **Talking Points to Help Families Assess and Plan for Health Needs Around Disasters and Evacuation**

Disasters affect families emotionally and physically, and often cause significant elevations in anxiety. Being prepared, especially around health needs, can mitigate stress and maximize positive outcomes. Here are some questions you can ask patients to help them assess and develop emergency preparedness plans responsive to their health needs:

- Do you or any of your family members have medical conditions that require medications, special medical equipment or a special diet?
- What might you or members of your family need to do about these health issues in an environment away from home?
- Have you communicated these health issues to a supervisor, teacher, day care or other professional in an environment in which you or a family member spend a significant portion of the day away from home?

#### **Steps Families Can Take to Prepare for Disasters around Health Issues**

During disasters, health medications and health supplies may be temporarily disrupted.

- At home, have an extra supply of medications available.
- Away from home, provide instructions and training (if possible) to a primary caregiver who would be responsible for your family member in a disaster.
- If that caregiver expresses reluctance or discomfort to administer help, have them identify a person within that environment who would be able to provide assistance with such procedures as injections or other requirements.
- Make sure adult children away from home, such as college students, are prepared. Make sure elderly members of your family are also prepared.

#### **Family Communication Plan**

A good communication plan provides a central role in relaying information about the status and location of

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loved ones; it will help to reduce anxiety at the time of and immediately following a disaster. To create a disaster communication plan, families must:

- Establish a primary contact and number (preferably a relative or friend in another part of the region or out of state) that family members can call in case of emergencies. Every member of the family should know this number.
- In the event that family members are separated, it is also important that daycare, work, school, and neighbors know this number.
- Prepare a list of phone numbers where each family member can be reached during the day. Include a list of relatives, friends and business associates that would or should know your whereabouts in case of emergency.

- During disasters, phone communications may be disrupted. Provide an alternative means for making calls, such as a special 'emergency' calling card or cell phone.
- It is important to be aware of other vehicles of communication such as the Internet, e-mail communication, and HAM radio. The Red Cross is also a resource to help contact loved ones.
- Leave a note at your residence to let others know where you are and how you can be contacted.

#### **Helpful Web Links:**

- <http://www.ready.gov>
- <http://www.fema.gov/kids/>
- <http://www.redcross.org/>

*Courage to Care* is a health promotion campaign of Uniformed Services University and its Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (CSTS). CSTS is the academic arm and a partnering Center of the Defense Centers of Excellence (5DCoE) for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury.



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