

DEPLOYING NEW YORK CITY'S DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS

The New York City Medical Reserve Corps is ready to deliver in emergencies.

At a Brooklyn shelter, a Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) psychologist found a Russian speaker among Hurricane Sandy evacuees to interpret for a terrified elderly immigrant couple. When the interpreter left the shelter, the psychologist gave the couple his own cell phone and the interpreter's phone number so they could call if they needed help.

A family arrived at a Manhattan shelter during Hurricane Sandy with rashes. A MRC physician was called to the shelter, where she diagnosed scabies and isolated the family to prevent contagion. Then she wrote the prescription, walked to the pharmacy and brought the medicine back.

A physician took an hour-long subway ride to an outlying neighborhood every night to cover the midnight to 8 AM shift at the Hurricane Shelter. Volunteer doctors changed adult diapers; a nurse cleaned the bathroom.

"They are mission driven," said the Director of the New York City MRC, one of the nation's largest, with over 7,700 volunteer healthcare professionals vetted and trained to supplement a stretched New York City Health Department staff during emergencies.

From physicians and nurses to veterinarians and acupuncturists, "they have this mentality that they are there to help, and that means doing whatever needs to be done."

During the response to Ebola, the MRC stood ready to assist. Over 500 MRC volunteers were trained to deliver key health messages at community events throughout New York City.

"The community had questions, and we had the answers," said the director.

This is not to say that the MRC does not meet any challenges. During Hurricane Sandy, for instance, calls from volunteers poured into the MRC office so fast that the three people covering the phones, including the director and the Corps's coordinator, were overwhelmed.

Since that time, the Health Department has instituted a new automated system to address the intricacies of volunteer scheduling, matching availability and skills to need, during a constantly changing emergency. MRC members can now log into a website that displays shifts available for their roles and sign up for assignments. Had the system been available in 2012, the Health Department might have deployed as many as 3,000 additional volunteers whose desire to work was hampered during Hurricane Sandy.

Difficulties notwithstanding, New York City's MRC received the Surgeon General's Community Resiliency Award in 2013, recognizing its work in Hurricane Sandy. One member, a psychologist specializing in neuropsychological rehabilitation, was honored as Outstanding MRC Responder for her 158 hours of service during the storm.



7,733
MRC volunteers
serve NYC, bringing
a wide range of
healthcare experience.



4,479

clinical staff volunteers



1,535

mental health volunteers



1,412

other healthcare
professional volunteers



307

non-medical
volunteers



Impact

- During Hurricane Sandy, the MRC deployed 1,230 volunteers who provided almost 19,000 hours of service. Many served multiple shifts.
- After Ebola's arrival in New York, volunteers reached out to over 7,000 cab drivers to educate and alleviate any stigma related to passengers of West African descent.
- More than 500 MRC volunteers were trained to present Ebola 101 courses to inform and educate healthcare professionals, first responders and the community.

Critical Need

- Create a unified federal, State and local strategy to optimize the use of healthcare volunteers during emergencies and through recovery efforts.
- Maintain a robust MRC volunteer registration and credentialing system, expand recruitment of additional volunteers and continue to offer robust opportunities for trainings and exercises to maintain volunteer engagement.
- Further develop and enhance an electronic system that supports rapid MRC staffing during emergencies.

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NYC Public Health and Healthcare Preparedness and Response REPORT

