On September 19 and 20, the NCDMPH convened subject matter experts in various areas of disaster response for its Natural Disaster Health Workforce National Conference in Crystal City, Virginia. The conference was held to supplement the Center’s efforts on the Workforce Project (Spring 2011 Newsletter), a landscape analysis of the nation’s disaster workforce supporting Emergency Support Function-8 (ESF-8).

The NCDMPH, as tasked by the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR), undertook this assignment by developing a report through a literature review, semi-structured interviews and a case-study that would be culled together in a report detailing who makes up the nation’s disaster health workforce and what their capabilities are.

The three stated objectives of the conference were to contribute to selected aspects of the workforce report (workforce supply, volunteerism and barriers), to consider input on next steps for additional case studies and for expanding the scope of the report and to present the initial case study and seek feedback on its methodology.

The conference kicked off with a presentation by Dr. Andrew Garrett (Deputy Chief Medical Officer, National Disaster Medical System, ASPR) that really helped the audience get a better understanding of how, and perhaps more importantly, why, the NCDMPH was needed to help estimate the capabilities and capacities of the disaster medicine workforce.

After Dr. Garrett’s presentation, conference attendees were treated to a panel discussion featuring local health responders discussing how federal entities can help better respond to natural disasters. Panel members J.J. Burke (Sandwich, MA Fire Department), Dr. Gloria Addo-Ayensu (Fairfax County, VA Health Department) and Jee Eun Kim (Los Angeles County, CA Department of Public Health) each lent their expertise and insight as to what works, and what doesn’t, when coordinating with federal response organizations at the local level.

Following the panel discussion, Dr. Dale Smith, Senior Vice President of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, gave a fascinating presentation on the history and evolution of what has become known as the field of disaster medicine and public health.

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NCDMPH Extends its Continuous Learning Improvement with Operation Continuing Promise

After an initial well-received assessment of the disaster response knowledge of the joint medical staff of Operation Continuing Promise 2010 (see Fall 2010 Newsletter), the NCDMPH was invited back for the 2011 operation to continue its work in improving the education and training of those providing humanitarian assistance abroad.

In 2010, on short notice, the NCDMPH administered a basic questionnaire designed to determine the level of knowledge of the joint medical staff of Continuing Promise who provide medical and humanitarian assistance to several countries as part of the United States goodwill effort. Based on the initial results of that assessment, the NCDMPH was invited to participate in pre-mission planning meetings with the goal of expanding participation in 2011 by developing and implementing a formal Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) curriculum.

To this end, the NCDMPH helped implement an education program for the medical personnel, who are made up of a wide-ranging coalition of physicians, nurses, public health professionals and other specialists. The program’s objectives ranged from being able to discuss the impact of host nation culture on care delivery and intervention strategies to demonstrating the knowledge and skills necessary to work in teams consisting of a mixed group of military medical providers, non-government organizations and interagency staff. The NCDMPH then used a training evaluation model to measure the impact of this education, as well as to assess the feasibility of alternative methods to provide education and training in austere environments.

As a part of the curriculum, the NCDMPH developed “Host Nation Briefs” – a concise summary of the demographics, health system, cultural beliefs and country-specific disease burdens for the host nations being visited, including Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Nicaragua and Peru. These host nation briefs can be found on the NCDMPH website.

In order to measure the success of this program, the NCDMPH administered a pre-program questionnaire to establish base-line knowledge and later conducted a post-intervention questionnaire. This collection of qualitative and quantitative data was

- Rebecca Zukowski, NCDMPH Project Lead

"The combination of the pre- and post-mission questionnaires, along with the NCDMPH’s active participation in the mission, really allowed us to get a better understanding of what these medical personnel already know, what they need to know and how we can best support their ability to transfer this knowledge to an actual disaster response scenario.”

Medical personnel from Continuing Promise 2011 prepare for arrival at their next host nation port.
NCDMPH Joins Social Media

The NCDMPH has recently launched a Facebook page and a Twitter account.

Social media has become an important form of communication by allowing an organization to facilitate conversation and discussed with its stakeholders. Additionally, social media platforms such as Twitter have become an ever-increasing part of the preparedness, response and recovery work of emergency managers.

With the launch of these accounts, the NCDMPH aims to have a very active presence in the social media world by pushing out the latest news, promoting preparedness, identifying the latest trends and stories in disaster medicine and public health and engaging with the public.

You can follow the NCDMPH by the Twitter handle @NCDMPH (http://twitter.com/#!/NCDMPH) and “like” the NCDMPH on Facebook by searching for “National Center for Disaster Medicine and Public Health.” Links to both accounts can also be found on our website.

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After the insightful presentations and discussions got everyone in the proper frame of mind, the conference attendees were divided into three assigned groups with the task of fulfilling the three conference objectives. Over the course of the next two days, the working groups (Cross-Cutting Issues, Future Plans and Case Study Methods) discussed ways to enhance sections of the workforce report and improve future workforce studies.

Each group, led by a moderator, came away with a number of recommendations for sections of the workforce report. Among them:

- The Case Study Group recommended the need for regional/State/local responders to anticipate exhaustion of resources due to time lag in federal resource arrival
- The Cross-Cutting Issues Group stressed the importance of ensuring responder safety and well-being in order to fully maximize the effectiveness of volunteer responders
- The Future Plans Group recommended that the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR), should be the federal lead agency in charge of ensuring the workforce study is repeated every three to five years

Prior to finishing up their working group recommendations on the second day, conference attendees were treated to an emotional and informative presentation by Dr. Robert Dodson, the Medical Director of Trauma at St. John’s Regional Medical Center in Joplin, MO. Dr. Dodson gripped the audience with stories from the recent tornado that decimated his hospital and how a resilient and well-trained disaster workforce was able to overcome great adversity to maximize its response capabilities and save lives.

At the end of the conference, significant strides had been made toward improving the NCDMPH’s disaster workforce report, which will be released online this fall. A full conference summary, including extensive recommendations from the working groups, is also available on the Workforce Project section of the NCDMPH website.

The NCDMPH would like to thank all of its speakers and attendees for participating in this conference and providing the Center with invaluable feedback toward an important study of what our nation’s health workforce is capable of doing and how we can improve it.
The NCDMPH is:

- Dr. Kenneth Schor, Acting Director
- Brian Altman, Education Coordinator
- David Berry, Communications Associate
- Kristen Brown, Administrative Assistant
- Laurie Chow, Research Associate
- Cynthia Hovor, Research Associate
- Robin Lowe, Website Developer
- Tim Moriarty, Workforce Project Lead
- Kandra Strauss-Riggs, Operations Director
- Rebecca Zukowski, Strategic Advisor

NCDMPH Welcomes Brian Altman to the Staff

Brian Altman, Education Coordinator, is the latest addition to the NCDMPH staff.

Along with the rest of the NCDMPH team, Dr. Altman helps to conceptualize the NCDMPH’s recommendations for education and training for all-hazards responders. With so much of the NCDMPH’s mission centered on improving education and methods of learning, Dr. Altman’s expertise will be a valuable asset to the Center’s team.

Dr. Altman is currently developing an “Adult Learning Academy” section of the NCDMPH website which will include concept maps, tip sheets and other adult learning resources.

Prior to earning his Ph.D., Dr. Altman worked in college recruiting and corporate/academic partnership programming in the building controls industry with schools in the United States and Canada.

Further background information on Dr. Altman can be found on the “About Us” section of the NCDMPH website.

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completed by using survey methodology, focus groups and participant observation of the surgical services, public health training, engineering support and veterinary services provided by the mission’s medical staff.

“The combination of the pre- and post-mission questionnaires, along with the NCDMPH’s active participation in the mission, really allowed us to get a better understanding of what these medical personnel already know, what they need to know and how we can best support their ability to transfer this knowledge to an actual disaster response scenario.” said Rebecca Zukowski, NCDMPH Project Lead.

“This kind of program evaluation allows us the opportunity to begin to build a body of knowledge which supports many aspects of domestic disaster response and the models necessary to support education and training in disaster health.”

Findings from this evaluation will be used to drive future recommendations related to missions of this nature as well as identify opportunities for future research. The full report will be available on our NCDMPH website upon its completion.

Photos from aboard the USNS Comfort for Continuing Promise 2011 can be found on the NCDMPH’s Facebook page.