



Saint Vincent Sponsors Federal Disaster Medical Assistance Team

First in PA Since 9/11

September 10, 2002

Saint Vincent Health System is pleased to announce that it will sponsor a federal Disaster Medical Assistance Team (DMAT), a mobile medical support team to respond when national disasters strike.

“Our goal,” said Angela Bontempo, Saint Vincent president and CEO, “is to be trained, equipped and fully deployable within 12 to 18 months, making us one of only 30 Level-1 DMATs in the United States.”

“On Sept. 11, we were all searching for a way to help, we simply didn’t have the right mechanism,” Bontempo added. “Now, we do.”

DMATs, a part of the National Disaster Medical System, are regional teams of medical and non-medical personnel. DMAT volunteers are credentialed, trained, equipped and ready for

rapid deployment – within 12-24 hours – to areas of federal disaster where local resources are overwhelmed. Most deployments are to scenes of natural disaster, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, floods and tornadoes. Recently, DMATs have also been deployed for acts of terror as well as for precautionary measures at major events, including the Presidential Inauguration and the Olympics.

During the aftermath of the 9/11 tragedy, all of the nation’s Level-1 DMATs were deployed to the World Trade Center and Pentagon sites. According to Saint Vincent officials, it was that dreadful day that inspired the health system to ensure the formation of a team based in this region.

“For years, we had considered forming a DMAT, but on Sept. 11, it became an imperative,” said Russell Bieniek, MD, medical director of the Saint Vincent Emergency Department and DMAT PA-3 unit commander. “Our real work has now begun. The support from our community’s governmental, medical and business sectors has been outstanding, and we expect it to grow enormously.”

“We are currently assembling a governing board and beginning to recruit and train more than 150 volunteers from hospitals and other organizations throughout the area. In 12 to 18 months, DMAT PA-3 will be ready to respond to federal disaster areas – natural or manmade.”

Federal activation is required to deploy a DMAT. There are two major types of deployment. The first is during federal disasters, which include earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, or other natural causes, or more recently, for weapons of mass destruction such as the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon.

The second DMAT deployment category is for pre-deployment to events that have the potential to need additional medical personnel available quickly. Examples of these have been presidential inaugurations, the Atlanta summer Olympic games, or the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics. Deployments are usually for two weeks, and teams in pre-deployment cases are given longer notice before their deployment.

A Level 1 team that is deployed for a field response assignment consists of 35 deploying personnel. They include:

9 Non-Healthcare Positions

2 DMAT Leaders

1 Safety Officer

1 Administrative/Finance Chief

1 Administrative Assistant

1 Logistics Chief

1 Equipment Specialist

2 Communications Officers

21 Healthcare Positions

3 Medical Officers

1 Pharmacist

1 Pharmacy Assistant

2 Supervisory Nurse Specialists

6 Staff Nurses

4 Nurse Practitioners or Physician Assistants

4 Paramedics

5 Other Positions, determined by DMAT

1 Home Base Support Person (not deployed)

Although DMAT members are considered volunteers during the original credentialing and training, when deployed the team members are employees of the U.S. Public Health Service. This provides for federalization of all professional licenses, federal worker's compensation coverage and federal liability coverage. Compensation will be at the federal employee rates, depending on the position on the team. All transportation, food, clothing, and lodging are provided during the deployment.

"With the addition of this Disaster Medical Assistance Team, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania takes another step forward in emergency preparedness and response," said Pennsylvania Secretary of Health Robert S. Zimmerman Jr. "I congratulate team sponsor Saint Vincent Health Center and unit commander Dr. Russ Bieniek. The strength and diversity of our medical community will be well reflected in having a fully-credentialed Disaster Medical Assistance Team based in Erie."

An informational meeting on the formation of the DMAT PA-3 unit will be held Wednesday, Sept. 25, at 6 p.m. at McGarvey Learning Center at Saint Vincent Health Center.