
Letter to the Editor

The Disaster Medicine Series

The Disaster Medicine Series in the *Journal of Clinical Medicine* (AJCM Vol. 3, #3, Summer 2006) covered a comprehensive description of many of the medical aspects that physicians will be faced with in the event of a disaster.

Americans now live with the threat of terrorism and the realization that they may experience exposure to biological, chemical and radiological agents (Lemonick DM. Scary Skin: Cutaneous Manifestations of Biological, Chemical and Radiological Terrorism). Until September 11, 2001, most physicians had not thought about anthrax, plague, botulism, yellow rain, smallpox, tularemia and viral hemorrhagic fevers since medical school. Dr. Lemonick's paper is an excellent review of dermatological manifestations of biological, chemical and radiological warfare.

While physicians, like most Americans, may fear worldwide terrorism and another attack on this country, we know very little about significant doses of ionizing radiation. Dr. David G.C. McCann's paper, "Radiation Poisoning: Current Concepts in the Acute Radiation Syndrome" provides us with a basic understanding of radiation exposure and the atypical presentation of those patients.

Dr. Arthur H. Lester's paper, "Disaster Response for Selected Pregnant Patients" is the most extensive description of trauma and disaster care for pregnant women in that I have seen. In the event of another disaster, it will serve as a very useful guide to those that care for the unique needs of pregnant women.

The series of papers on disaster medicine by Dr. Maurice A. Ramirez describe disaster preparation, the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Disaster Life Support (DSL). According to Dr. Ramirez, physicians are more likely to be called upon to utilize Disaster Life Support skills than cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Core Disaster Life Support (CDLS) is the equivalent of CPR designed for the general public and teaches basic disaster preparedness and survival awaiting rescue.

"The Role of the Coroner/Medical Examiner After a Disaster," is written by one of the most famous forensic pathologists, Dr. Cyril Wecht. It is a well-organized approach to the management of mass casualties and disasters. Dr. Wecht describes three primary roles of the Coroner/Medical Examiner: 1) examination of human remains; 2) positive identification of remains; and, 3) determination of the cause and manner of death.

"The New Normal: Identification and Treatment of Weapons of Mass Destruction Illness and Injuries," by Dr. Jack Wells describes illnesses and injuries that accompany insult with weapons of mass destruction.

Whether it is in the treatment and management of the sick and injured or assistance with the functions of the medical examiner's office, physicians should take an active part in the coordinated response to mass disasters.

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