

MRC Statewide Meeting April 14th, 2010

Minutes

Michael Coughlin, DPH, opened the meeting at 10:07 AM. He invited attendees to introduce themselves (see attendance).

H1N1 Update

Mr. Coughlin gave an update on the H1N1 response. DPH held a conference in Worcester on March 22 to discuss lessons learned from the H1N1 response. Overall, the response was a success, and Massachusetts emerged as a leading state in vaccination of children and adults. During an awards ceremony at the conference, the Massachusetts Medical Reserve Corps program was recognized with a "Public Health Hero" award. Cheryl Bushnell, Bristol County MRC Collaborative, accepted the award on behalf of the Medical Reserve Corps. Ms. Bushnell said that unit leaders should contact her if they would like to borrow the trophy for local events.

Mr. Coughlin also distributed a letter from DPH Commissioner John Auerbach thanking MRC volunteers for their work and noting the recent award. One participant asked if the CDC would be distributing pins for volunteers who participated in the H1N1 response. Mr. Coughlin said he knew they were coming at some point but did not know any details.

Terry Nelson, Wilbraham MRC, asked if a DVD or CD of the conference or the award ceremony could be distributed. Mr. Coughlin said the conference webcast and pictures were up on the DPH website.¹

Mr. Coughlin described some of the topics covered at the conference:

- Lab testing - Massachusetts was very successful and one of the first states in the country to establish the capacity for lab testing.
- Care - Massachusetts was also very successful ensuring care and medication for the ill.
- Communication - DPH regularly held conference calls to keep local public health in the loop. DPH made strong efforts to provide information in as many languages as possible. DPH produced and distributed Flu Facts brochures, and Dr. Lauren Smith made multiple appearances in PSAs on local radio and TV programs.
- Vaccine Distribution - Mr. Coughlin recognized generous federal funding as a key asset for the state. DPH also successfully established a widely used vaccination distribution system. Over 1,000 sites distributed and administered the vaccine to target groups. Collaboration between local public health and schools was a critical component for housing flu clinics and vaccinating children.

¹ The direct link to the award ceremony video is: <http://www.vimeo.com/10336532>

Sandy Collins, Upper Merrimack Valley MRC, said DPH should further evaluate how many schools participated and to what level. She said some superintendents were more helpful than others. She said DPH should reach out to schools about stronger collaborations with local public health. Joanne Martel, Greater River Valley MRC, suggested sharing success stories as a model for other school districts.

Ms. Bushnell asked if there was information compiled about MRC participation statewide. Mr. Coughlin said there were no hard numbers. He suggested that MRC units send in their information to DPH who would then compile the data. Nancy Burns, Upper Merrimack Valley MRC, suggested that MRC units send in the number of positions filled by volunteers. Sharon Mastenbrook, Burlington MRC, suggested units share the number of deployments and the numbers of volunteers at each deployment. Dawn Sibor, Brookline MRC, noted that it might be difficult for units who participated in regional clinics to collect this information and asked why units should compile this data. Ms. Burns said that statewide numbers would be good for publicity and that it would be nice to have a hard number for the volunteer work being done statewide. Ms. Mastenbrook said the numbers could be used in a press release. Ms. Collins added that MRC volunteers should receive as much recognition as schools and other collaborators. Regina Villa Associates (RVA) will work with Ms. Burns to determine the appropriate metric to request and send that information to individuals units. RVA will work with DPH to compile the data statewide.

Mr. Coughlin noted there were some specific attributes of the pandemic worth noting. Younger people and people of color were hit particularly hard by the virus. DPH recognizes the need to do a better job reaching out to at-risk populations. Mr. Coughlin said DPH will continue to prepare and improve partnerships to respond to future pandemics. He noted that this winter's response was an example of government responding effectively to a significant challenge. He said the after action report will be out before June 30.

Jean Roma, Cape Code and Martha's Vineyard MRCs, passed around a *New York Times* article that discussed the H1N1 response and described public health in a global perspective.

Alvin McMahon, Greater Fall River MRC, said this year's response also helped raise awareness for seasonal flu vaccination. He anticipates strong numbers for next year's seasonal vaccination efforts.

Margaret Whittaker, North Shore/Cape Ann MRC, said her unit was working on a report that focused on three different stages of the response: the initial stage with limited resources, the middle stage where the towns had received the vaccine, and the final stage where the towns have too much vaccine on their hands.

Ms. Collins said the Local Public health Coalition was developing an after-action report, that focused on local (not statewide) responses. They are currently in the process of holding meetings with regional coalitions.

One participant noted she had difficulty working with unresponsive schools. Ms. Parent said that schools cooperating in many different kinds of ways – not just hosting flu clinics. Schools helped local health by assisting with surveillance and public messaging. Jeanne Spalding, Middleborough MRC, said many schools were bound by the decisions of the administration and superintendents. She said the Commonwealth should consider reaching out to superintendents to discuss ideal levels of collaboration. Ms. Mastenbrook noted that schools in her area were hesitant to open clinics when local public health had limited supplies of vaccine. She said there was also some confusion over whether teachers were a target group.

Mr. Nelson said his unit had a great relationship with the nearby schools. He said a lot of partnerships between local health and public schools had been developed via health grants which helped reduce any acrimony between local public health and the schools over time. He suggested local public health look into school funding issues to help improve relationships with local schools.

Mr. McMahon noted that, in his region, the Somerset Town Nurse met with school officials and decided to vaccinate children one grade at a time. He said that model was a great success.

Mr. Coughlin noted techniques around the state varied, and many different methods worked. He noted that Rhode Island was particularly successful in the percentage of children vaccinated because they only have one health department and decided to focus solely on children in the early phases of the pandemic.

Ms. Bushnell said the Bristol County MRC Collaborative was holding a Hot Topics conference on July 9th at the Taunton Holiday Inn. The event is open to all MRC volunteers, and they will be discussing the H1N1 response.

Teresa Wood Kett, Newton MRC, asked how much vaccine would be available for schools in the fall. Mr. Coughlin said it was too early to tell. As soon as that information is available, MRC units will be notified.

Mr. McMahon asked if DPH had any guidance regarding disposal of vaccine. Mr. Coughlin responded that vaccine is not considered medical waste as long as the vial is not broken. He recommended that local public health hold onto vaccine that hadn't expired.

Ms. Whittaker asked if there was any guidance regarding leftover PHER funding. Mr. Coughlin said there had been no decision from the CDC on whether the funding would rollover.

MRC/MSAR Integration

Regan Checchio, RVA, gave a summary of the needs assessment interviews held by RVA with MRC unit leaders in February and March. She said that most unit leaders recognized improved data management and statewide credential consistency as advantages to MRC/MSAR integration. Ms. Checchio said that DPH and MRC units would need to agree on policies and agreement for the database system that would address DPH roles and responsibilities, liability, disclosure and confidentiality agreements, activation protocols, minimum credentialing standards and a sustainability plan. Unit leaders also identified and prioritized features that could be included in the database system. RVA and DPH will incorporate MRC input as they develop an RFP for database vendors. MRC unit leaders will be invited to join a (1) *Development Committee* to draft templates and agreements between participating units and DPH; (2) an *Implementation Committee* to ensure that the system includes the appropriate and necessary features; (3) *Testing* to be among the first units to utilize the system as "beta-testers" and, (4) a *Marketing Committee* to create an identity or brand for the new partnership including a logo, design elements, and messaging. For more details, please see attached memo.

John Coulon, Topsfield Regional MRC, asked if there would be a statewide standard for badging as part of integration. Ms. Checchio said there are currently statewide guidelines, but that integration would not likely enforce any badging standards.

Ms. Mastenbrook expressed concern that the database system would not be sustainable. Mr. Coughlin said that sustainability is always an issue in emergency preparedness. DPH has received state appropriate funds for this year and likely will next year. Lindsay Tallon, DPH, noted that the RFP will ask vendors to include an export function. Should the state run out of money for the system, unit leaders would be able to export their database from the system. Ms. Mastenbrook noted that the database should be able export into multiple file formats. Ms. Checchio said that could be addressed in the sustainability plan. Ms. Bushnell said any sustainability plan should have redundancy provisions, in the event the data system became unavailable.

Mr. Coughlin introduced Lindsay Tallon who will work for DPH as the Health Volunteer Manager. She will oversee the MRC/MSAR integration effort. Ms. Tallon will work with MRC units regarding agreements for the system and will reach out to licensing boards to try to incorporate some automatic credentialing features. Ms. Tallon said that local units will maintain local control of their volunteers. In the case of a statewide deployment, the state would follow the shelter protocols developed last year and would contact local coordinators to activate their units. She recognized that many units want strong security and support. She noted that participation will be voluntary and that she would always be open to input.

Ms. Martel said she has had problems with the MAVEN system in the past and recommended Ms. Tallon talk with administrators who have had similar experience. Ms.

Tallon said she has reached out to units who had purchased similar software and to other states as well.

Ms. Mastenbrook said there must be a plan for when the system is done in an emergency.

Ms. Martel asked if units could use some features of the database and not others, depending upon a unit's needs. Ms. Tallon said the system should be flexible in that regard. It would be up to units to use the database as they want.

Ms. Kett asked if there was a timeline. Ms. Tallon said an RFP should be released in the next several weeks. She said the database would need to be purchased by the end of July, but hoped it would be up sooner.

Mr. McMahon asked how the state would handle the MSAR database. Mr. Coughlin responded that historically the state has never used MSAR and that this integration would help make it a viable system. He said MSAR volunteers would be encouraged to affiliate with local MRC units.

Anne Marie Fleming, Bristol Norfolk MRC, asked if Minnesota's system had a sustainability plan. Mr. Coughlin said he wasn't sure, but that he would check with them.

David Nichols, Greater River Valley MRC, asked if this system would be a database or a communications system. Ms. Tallon responded that it would be both. It would be a database with the capability of calling out to volunteers via phone or email. Ms. Mastenbrook said the ability to get a response from volunteers via phone call outs would be a big advantage. Ms. Whittaker confirmed that this call out feature would have message templates or allow the unit leader to send out voice recordings. Ms. Martel confirmed that this feature would be used by locals and not the state. There was some discussion on whether unit leaders would use this function.

Mr. McMahon confirmed that the database would not tie into the HHAN.

Ms. Spalding recommended DPH bring the RFP to the May Summit.

March Flooding Response

Mr. Coughlin said there was some activity in DPH's Emergency Preparedness Bureau (EPB) in response to flooding around the state in March. EPB staffed an ESF 8 desk and helped coordinate some MRC deployments to staff shelters. He noted this was a good opportunity to test out communication protocols. He welcomed feedback from unit leaders.

Mr. Winsor noted that the daily reports from the ESF desk were very helpful, including the message that the desk had been activated.

Ms. Mastenbrook asked who sets up a shelter. Ms. Collins responded it was different in every community. In most cases, the Emergency Management Director (EMD) or the American Red Cross (ARC) set them up. It is then up to the EMD to reach out to local public health and the MRC.

Ms. Bushnell asked why Region 4A volunteers were sent to shelters before the local Bristol County MRC units were notified. Mr. Coughlin said that ARC reached out to the regional Worcester MRC and Region 4A to put on standby before the ESF desk was opened. This likely resulted from signed MOUs between the organizations. An ARC intern then requested the volunteers from those units instead of following the protocols (to activate via ESF 8). Mr. Coughlin said this would be addressed by having a communications protocol training/exercise that will include ARC.

Ms. Martel said she tried to respond a message from the ESF-8 desk but kept getting a busy signal when she tried to call back. By the time she was able to get through other units had come to staff shelters in her area. She noted that units should be given a reasonable amount of time to respond to ESF-8 desk requests before sending in volunteers from outside units. Ms. Martel also noted there was some confusion between the ESF-6 (American Red Cross) and the ESF-8 desk. She noted that the ESF-6 desk wanted the shelter in her area to stay open over the weekend despite no one being in attendance. Mr. Coughlin recognized that communications between ARC and the ESF-8 desk would have to improve. He also noted that shelters were run on a case by case basis. He said the protocols should be expanded to allow local units a reasonable amount of time to respond to requests.

Ms. Martel noted that she didn't receive a call to her home number. She asked if the emergency contact info at the ESF-8 desk was up to date. Mr. Coughlin said he would look into this.

Ms. Mastenbrook said there was no closure to the shelter operations. Mr. Coughlin said the ESF-8 desk should send a message when it closes.

Mr. Coughlin said he hoped lessons learned from this incident would help clear up some confusion between ARC and DPH in the future. He also recognized that the ESF-8 staffers need additional training on communicating with MRC leaders.

Ms. Sibor noted that unit coordinators can turn off their HHAN alerts if they were outside of the state.

Liisa Jackson, Region 4A MRC, said she put her unit on standby after receiving the initial request from ARC. She said ARC was trying to utilize any immediate resources. She apologized for any confusion. Ms. Bushnell suggested that units deploying outside of their jurisdiction should contact the local unit coordinator.

Rick Reuss, Randolph MRC, suggested coordinators visit MEMA's WebEOC to get information about which shelters are opened and closed. Ms. Martell said WebEOC was useful if the local EMD used it.

Mr. Coughlin said that Roberta Clark, DPH, is prepared to put together an exercise for these protocols. He said anyone interested in joining a planning team for this exercise should contact him. The group agreed that late June would be best for the exercise and that it should hold a virtual and table top component.

Unit Updates

Ms. Jackson said Region 4A was running a number of sheltering courses and developing shelter deployment protocols for within the unit. They were also holding a number of emotional resilience courses.

Ms. Roma said her unit was running a recruitment campaign at health fairs and adult immunization events. They are also planning a volunteer appreciation banquet.

Mr. Winsor said his unit held a volunteer appreciation night at the DCU center for a Worcester Sharks game. He's also conducting a survey with current volunteers to see who is active in the unit and who should be removed from the database.

Ms. Parent said her unit is focused on improving collaboration with the CERT team.

Mr. Nelson said he started as the coordinator for the Wilbraham MRC in January. He is planning a volunteer feedback event for May.

Ms. Bushnell said the Bristol County MRC units are considering transitioning into a regional database system. She also noted that the New Bedford MRC unit is currently in a state of transition between coordinators.

Ms. Fleming said the Bristol Norfolk MRC was planning a volunteer appreciation event in May.

Ms. Martel said her unit held an after action meeting with volunteers. They made shirts and would be handing out certificates as well as pins from the national office.

Stephanie Bozigian Merrick said her unit held 35 clinics in Holyoke. Western MA MRC units would be participating in a leadership conference on April 16.

Ms. Collins said her unit was planning a Haitian relief event where the unit would collect supplies to send over. She said she was able to find a vendor that would send the supplies for free.

Mr. McMahon said his unit held 27 clinics and with collaboration between the MRC unit, schools, EMTs and the local health department. Some school nurses joined the unit after working some of the clinics.

Ms. Spalding asked if PHER funding could be used for marketing materials such as shirts. Mr. Coughlin said PHER funding could not be spent for that purpose, but that PHEP funding could.

Other Business

Mr. Coughlin said Jennifer Frenette could not make it for a Regional Update, but that he looked forward to seeing everyone at the National Integration Summit in Nashville in May. The Charlie Daniel's Band will be playing at the Grand Ole Opry on Friday night.

Ms. Roma distributed an article from the New England Journal of Medicine that discussed the value of volunteers in disaster response.

Cape Cod Special Needs Shelter

John Grieb, DPH, asked any interested MRC unit leaders to stay after the meeting to discuss and plan staffing from outside MRC units for a Special Needs Shelter planned for Cape Cod in case of a hurricane. Any interested unit leaders should reach out to him at his email address, john.greib@state.ma.us.

Attendance

Michael Bookman	MA Taskforce
Stephanie Bozigian-Merrick	Holyoke MRC
Alison Minkoff Burns	Region 4B MRC
Nancy Burns	Upper Merrimack Valley MRC
Cheryl Bushnell	Bristol County MRC Collaborative
Regan Checchio	Regina Villa Associates
Judith Chevarley	DPH
Sandy Collins	Upper Merrimack Valley MRC
Mike Coughlin	DPH
Charles Cotnoir	Martha's Vineyard MRC
John Coulon	Toppsfield MRC
Dawn Farmer	Grafton MRC
John Grieb	DPH
Liisa Jackson	Region 4A MRC
Teresa Wood Kett	Newton MRC
Stacey Lane	Norwood MRC
Jennie Manni	Taunton MRC
Joanne Martell	Greater River Valley MRC
Corinne McKeown	Berkshire MRC
Alvin McMahan	Greater Fall River MRC
Sharon Mastenbrook	Burlington MRC
Frank Morrisino	East Longmeadow MRC
Poppy Nelson	Wilbraham MRC
Terry Nelson	Wilbraham MRC
Dave Nichols	Greater River Valley MRC
Trish Parent	Grafton MRC
Charlie Patton	Regina Villa Associates
Rick Reuss	Randolph MRC
Jean Roma	Martha's Vineyard MRC
Kimberly Scanlon	Mystic Valley MRC
Stephanie Sharp	Boston MRC
Dawn Sibor	Brookline MRC
Jeanne Spalding	Middleborough MRC
Lindsay Tallon	DPH
Margaret Whittaker	North Shore Cape Ann MRC
Shawn Winsor	Worcester Regional MRC