



NATIONAL DISASTER MEDICAL SYSTEM

Ordinary Heroes in Extraordinary Times



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE
OFFICE OF PREPAREDNESS AND EMERGENCY OPERATIONS



National Disaster Medical System: Ordinary Heroes in Extraordinary Times

Natural and man-made disasters—hurricanes, earthquakes, pandemic disease, major transportation accidents, terrorist attacks—bring an urgent need for health and medical care and sometimes for people to help with mass casualties.

These “worst of times” can overwhelm the resources of a state or local agency. That’s when the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) is called to action.

At a state’s request, NDMS provides personnel, equipment, supplies, and a system of partner hospitals working together with state and local personnel to provide care and support to communities when every minute counts.

“For me, it’s a chance to participate in an urgent medical need in a way that is compatible with my day job. It’s a chance to work with a very competent, enthusiastic group of people on a common problem. And I always learn new information with every event.”

– *Dr. John Andrews, OH-1 DMAT*



Ordinary Heroes

NDMS personnel are pre-organized and trained as teams which draw on an array of professionals: doctors, nurses, paramedics, emergency medical technicians, pharmacists, veterinarians, forensic dentists, funeral directors, logistics specialists, and many others. In a major disaster these teams travel to the disaster site to provide emergency medical care, staff medical shelters or medical stations, augment hospital staff, provide veterinary care, or conduct disaster mortuary operations.

NDMS team personnel are intermittent federal employees, paid by the federal government for their service to the nation when called into action for a national emergency response. Today, there are more than 7,000 professionals and support staff on more than 90 teams throughout the country who have agreed to help devastated communities by becoming a part of NDMS.

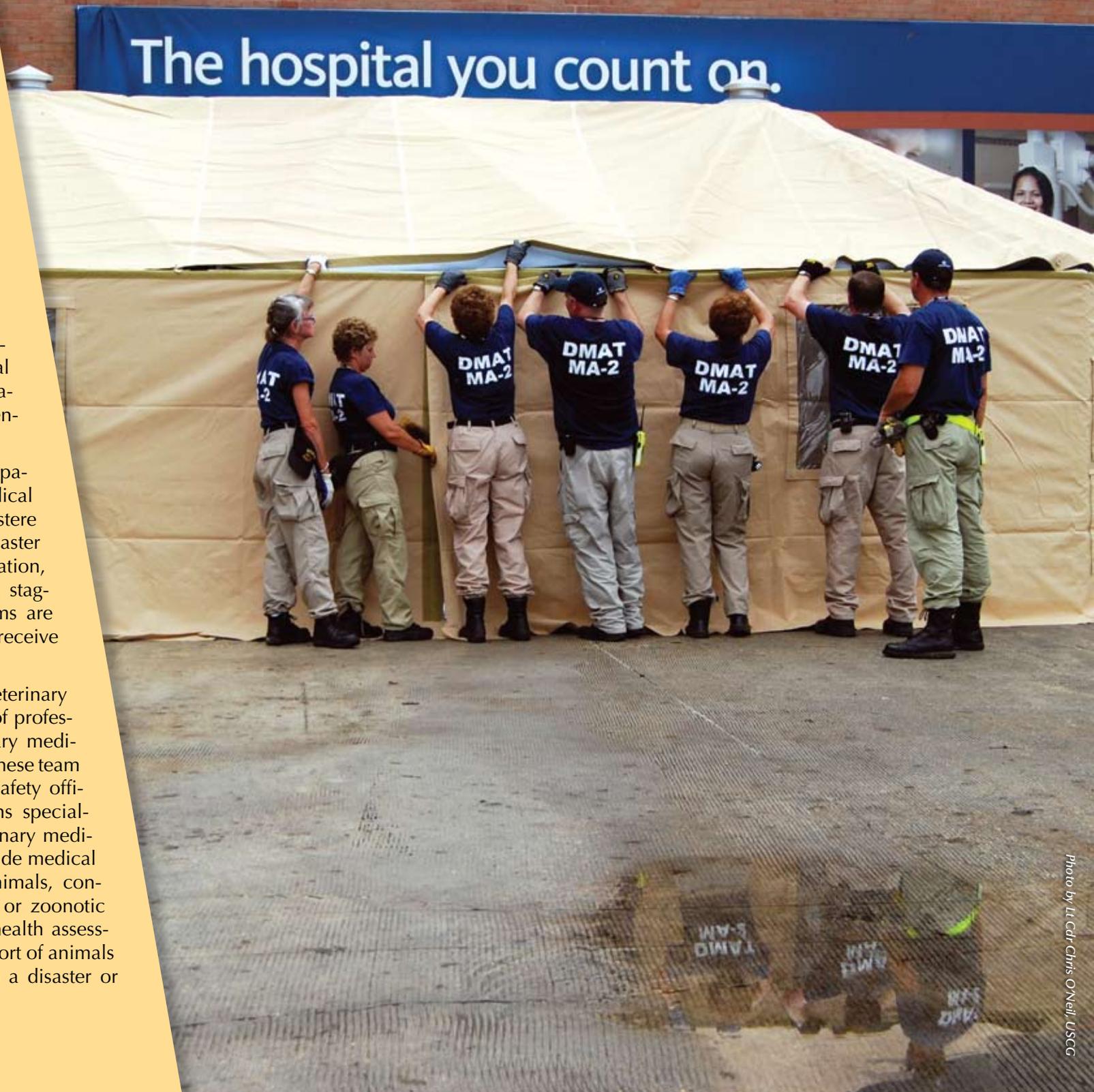
NDMS personnel are required to maintain appropriate certifications and licensure within their discipline. When personnel are activated, licensure and certification is recognized by all states. Additionally, NDMS medical personnel have the protection of the Federal Tort Claims Act in which the federal government becomes the defendant in the event of a malpractice claim and coverage under the Uniform Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) for federal trainings and response to a Public Health Emergency or potential Public Health Emergency.

NDMS Medical Teams

The NDMS provides care for people using three types of medical teams: Disaster Medical Assistance Teams (DMAT), International Medical Surgical Teams (IMSURT), and National Medical Response Teams (NMRT). These professional and para-professional medical personnel, supported by pharmacists, epidemiologists, logistical and administrative staff, provide medical care during a disaster or other national events, such as the presidential inauguration.

The medical teams may triage patients, provide high-quality medical care despite the adverse and austere environment often found at a disaster site, prepare patients for evacuation, and provide patient reception at staging facilities when disaster victims are evacuated to a different locale to receive definitive medical care.

NDMS also includes National Veterinary Response Teams (NVRT), cadres of professionals with expertise in veterinary medicine, public health and research. These team technicians, with support from safety officers, logisticians, communications specialists, and others—assess the veterinary medical needs of the community, provide medical treatment and stabilization of animals, conduct animal disease surveillance or zoonotic disease surveillance and public health assessments, and provide care and support of animals certified as official responders to a disaster or emergency.





Mortuary Teams

Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Teams (DMORT) are comprised of forensic scientists, medical examiners, coroners, pathologists, forensic anthropologists, medical records technicians and transcribers, finger print specialists, forensic odontologists, dental assistants, x-ray technicians, funeral directors, mental health specialists, computer professionals, administrative support staff, and security and investigative personnel.

The teams are activated for disasters with mass casualties, working under the guidance of local authorities to provide technical assistance and personnel. DMORT personnel may set up temporary morgue facilities or work in local facilities to help with victim identification and assist in the processing, preparation and the disposition of remains. Their work provides support at a critical time for families who have lost loved ones in the disaster.

“First and foremost, I wanted to use my education and experience to help others. Being on a federal team also gave me national experience because I was exposed to larger, more visible disaster response activities that, otherwise, I wouldn’t have encountered.”

– John Linstrom, DMORT-IX

The Extraordinary Times

Some years are disaster free. Some years teem with multiple disasters. That's why NDMS team personnel stand ready to spend up to two weeks at a disaster. Team employees attend various training events to better prepare them during responses.

In a disaster, hotels, restaurants and hospitals may be destroyed. NDMS arranges transportation for teams and meets the team on location with medical equipment and supplies, mobile "field hospital" style tents, food, and water so that teams can support the disaster medical response and care for themselves. Teams must be capable of self-sustaining in austere environments for 72 hours because transportation to restock food and water can be challenging in major disaster situations. NDMS also provides a command structure so teams can work effectively and focus on providing medical care.

"There's no better feeling than providing medical care to appreciative patients in their time of need. In the fast-paced, post-disaster environment when you never know what's coming next, you realize how much more you're capable of doing than you thought you were."

– David Lipin, CA-6 DMAT





“I wanted to make a difference in pets/ animals lives more than I was doing in private practice. I wanted to do something different and challenging. The idea of helping animals and their owners during their greatest need interested me. I had no idea my first deployment would be to care for Urban Search and Rescue dogs on Ground Zero. Helping our country protect itself, although in a different way than normal, is an added bonus.”

– Karen Iovino, DVM, NVRT-2

Delivering Critical Services

NDMS enhances a state or community’s health and medical response capability. State and local health care systems benefit from a coordinated federal effort that provides:

- Medical response to supplement services at the disaster site
- Patient evacuation to designated locations throughout the U.S. for casualties that cannot be cared for locally or when health-care facilities in the disaster path must evacuate
- Hospitalization through a national network of hospitals that have agreed to accept patients from a major disaster area.

To make it happen, NDMS brings together four federal agencies: the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and the Department of Homeland Security’s Federal Emergency Management Agency (DHS/FEMA).

At the disaster site, NDMS teams may establish field hospitals, triage patients, provide austere medical care, augment overwhelmed healthcare staffs, and/or prepare patients for evacuation.

To safely and efficiently evacuate patients from hospitals, DoD, VA, and NDMS personnel work side-by-side with hospital’s staff, including patients’ doctors. More than 2,000 hospitals and other medical facilities have agreed to receive disaster patients on a moment’s notice as part of the NDMS network.



Could you be an ordinary hero in extraordinary times? Find out...

<http://www.hhs.gov/aspr/opeco/ndms/join/index.html>

“It takes a special kind of person to join NDMS, someone motivated by a strong desire— a devotion—to helping those in need who are experiencing some of the most devastating circumstances of their lives. You would have to be prepared to go out the door at a moment’s notice, leaving family, friends, job, and the normal routine but during a disaster mission you get to use the skills you already have in a very special and unique way. It is immensely gratifying.”

– *Dr. Patricia Kaufmann, DMORT-III*

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