

Preparing for disaster

By Jay Edwards

In the event of a large scale emergency, you are one of the first responders. Whether or not you work in a hospital, everyone in our community plays an important role during a crisis.

For healthcare workers, being a first responder can mean showing up at a predetermined location to care for a large influx of injured patients. For others, such as members of the San Francisco Neighborhood Emergency Response Teams (SFNERT), this could mean assisting disaster recovery efforts throughout the city. We all must have a plan to ensure our own families and homes are prepared for a potential crisis.

“Everyone should have a plan for the first 96-hours of an emergency. This is how long it could take for help to arrive from the state or federal government,” says Kathy Sforzo, chief safety officer for California Pacific Medical Center.

The First 96 Hours

San Francisco faces specific challenges when it comes to disaster planning. The city depends on bridges to supply residents with critical items such as fuel, food, medical supplies and water. “There’s a good chance a major earthquake could knock out our supply routes, increasing the time period that we’d need to be completely self-sufficient,” says Sforzo.



California Pacific has a plan in place to be able to operate for the first 96 hours of a disaster. This means ensuring that the medical center has either adequate resources on hand or access to resources to care for patients over an extended time period.

“Disaster recovery is a team effort. We have agreements with other hospitals and supply companies throughout the region to share critical resources in the event of a crisis,” says Sforzo. “This is important because no matter how much you prepare, you can never truly know what your needs or the needs



of others will be until an actual event occurs.”

In addition to preparing to have enough supplies in the event of emergency, California Pacific is giving its workforce disaster response training. Each year, the hospital undergoes disaster scenario training to assess preparedness strengths and weaknesses. Mock command centers are set up and personnel take on roles they would perform in the case of an actual event. The emergency departments at each of the hospital’s four campuses teach healthcare workers how to sort and triage a large number of victims.



Building for a safe future

Following the 1994 Northridge earthquake in Southern California, state legislators passed a bill requiring all acute care hospitals to be seismically retrofitted or rebuilt by 2015. To comply with this legislation, California Pacific has several large scale construction projects in the works. These include plans for a new campus at Cathedral Hill, a replacement hospital for the St. Luke’s campus. Davies has been retrofitted to meet the new seismic standards.

Safety experts and architects have worked closely together to see that the new and upgraded hospitals are more than seismically safe. Not only will our new acute care facilities withstand a major seismic event but they will remain operational and open to serve our community.



The Cathedral Hill campus is located in the center of San Francisco. If there was a city-wide crisis, it would be a focal point of relief efforts,” says Sforzo. The new campus will have larger storage capacity for essential supplies, a built-in decontamination unit and a command center with high-tech communications capabilities.

San Francisco Neighborhood Emergency Response Teams

Beyond the walls of California Pacific’s hospitals, San Francisco residents are joining SFNERT to help be self sufficient in the event of a disaster. SFNERT comprises of multifunctional teams, cross-trained in emergency skills. Team members go through specialized, hands-on training that help them serve as members of emergency response teams. Members are taught to work along with city emergency services and to act independently to provide immediate care in their neighborhood as needed. SFNERT members are an important link to medical care and other recovery services in the case of an emergency. To learn more about SFNERT in your neighborhood, call 415-970-2022 or visit www.sfgov.org/sfnert.

How to become prepared for the next disaster:

- Contact San Francisco’s Neighborhood Emergency Response Team to become more informed about neighborhood plans and preparedness and become trained in first Aid. www.sfgov.org/sfnert.
- Identify potential hazards in your home and fix them. Many hardware stores carry kits to secure appliances and bookcases.
- Be sure your family knows how to protect themselves during an earthquake.
- Create a disaster kit.
- Know disaster response plans for your work, your children’s schools and your parents’ residence, if they reside in an assisted living residence, nursing home or skilled nursing facility.

Free Hands on Disaster Awareness and Preparedness Training

Date: Sat, May 2 and Sat, May 9
Time: 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Location:
California Pacific Medical Center
Davies Auditorium North Tower
Duboce and Castro

Please RSVP to
sffdnet@sfgov.org
or call 415-970-2024

Visit www.sfgov.org/sffdnet
to see more about the training, other locations
and register on line.