

# The HEART Beat

## Special Interest Articles:

✱ **Crisis and Emergency Risk Communications**

✱ **Redundant Communication Efforts**

✱ **Sandi's Corner**

✱ **Haitian Relief Efforts**



This issue of the HEARTBeat focuses on emergency communication, both with emergency and health responders and with the public.



Denton County Health Department  
Health Emergency Alert Response Team  
940-349-2909



## Denton County Communicates

Dr. Jessica Gullion, Chief Epidemiologist

Analysis of disaster response almost always includes the same criticism: communication breakdown. Clear communication is crucial and will directly bear on the number of lives lost. To mitigate communication difficulties, the Denton County Health Department (DCHD) has created several routes for pushing out information to the public and to community partners and health care providers.

In 1999, DCHD, along with Denton ISD and hospital emergency room representatives, created the Communicable Disease Response Team (CDRT). This team is comprised of representatives from local and state public health, hospitals, city and county emergency management departments, police and fire officials, local universities and school districts, mental health providers, infectious disease specialists, sanitarians, large employers, and others who would respond to a public health disaster. Team members attend face to face meetings

bimonthly to discuss communicable disease activities within the county as well as disaster planning activities. Members benefit from knowing each other and each others' roles before disaster strikes.

Between meetings, information is communicated to CDRT members either by the Chief Epidemiologist or the Public Information Officer in the form of emails and faxes. A CDRT Advisory is a health update that is emailed to all CDRT members. Advisories typically do not require any action on the part of the members, and is used primarily for awareness purposes. A CDRT Alert is more serious in nature. Alerts are emailed to members and are also faxed to all licensed physicians in Denton County.

Other rapid communications channels include emailed information to school nurses within the county, and to sanitarians and other environmental health officials. Databases of key partners are updated and tested regularly to remain

current.

To push information out to the public, DCHD relies on press releases prepared and distributed by the Public Information Officer to all media outlets which extend into the county. This allows DCHD to reach much of the public with a centralized message in a short period of time. DCHD also maintains a website that is updated with accurate and timely information for the public to access. Various topical and emergency hotlines are also maintained in an effort to educate and provide relevant information to the public.

Currently, the Denton County Health Department has active hotlines prepared to handle inquiries on a variety of topics, including H1N1 Influenza and West Nile virus. The DCHD's Flu Information Line has the most current information including dates, times, and locations for public H1N1 influenza clinics in English and Spanish.

*Flu Information Line:*  
(940) 349-4FLU (4358)



## Crisis and Emergency Risk Communications

Betsy Haggard, Public Information Officer

A public health emergency is an occurrence or imminent threat of an illness or health condition, caused by bioterrorism, epidemic or pandemic disease, or novel and highly fatal infectious agent or biological toxin, that poses a substantial risk of a significant number of human fatalities or incidents of permanent or long-term disability. Such illness or health condition includes, but is not limited to, an illness or health condition resulting from a national disaster.

A public health emergency triggers a level of public interest and media inquiry that requires a significant increase in staffing and/or resources to make a reasonable media response. During a public health emergency, there is often uncertainty and concern about how the public can stay safe. Local and state officials must respond to the emergency, while also providing accurate, rapid, and consistent information to help people protect themselves and others. Often times during emergencies, breakdowns occur in communications, disruption of services, and even rumors.

To make certain that the release of information occurs correctly, many emergency response organizations have a Crisis and Emergency Risk Communications Plan or a CERC plan. The CERC plan provides policies and procedures for the coordination of communications with Denton County Health Department (DCHD) and between DCHD, the media, other agencies and the public in the event of any public health threat, emergency or controversial issue that demands a public health response. It may also provide guidance when sharing information with community partners and health care professionals regarding exposure risks and effective responses to deliberate or accidental disease causing agents. This lays out procedural strategies for ensuring accurate releases of timely information.

Consideration is also given to the fact that, in providing the public with needed information, it will be necessary to communicate in more than one language and to those with special needs.

Components have been added to the CERC plan that discusses strategies and avenues to distribute information to those individuals in our communities.

Some events may bring many reporters, photographers, and camera crews to an area, creating many demands on emergency public information systems, possibly causing a need for additional assistance. In the instance that additional public information professionals are needed, assistance would be requested from the Denton County Communicators group. The Denton County Communicator group includes public information and communications professionals from various public and private organizations across the county that have agreed to help each other in times of need. Denton County is very unique and lucky to have this asset available during times of crisis.

While a CERC plan cannot alleviate the threat of terrorism or solve public health problems, good communications can affect how the public, media, and health care and emergency management providers react to a health emergency.



sandi's  
2010

## New Goals for a New Year

Sandi Wiggins, MRC Coordinator

Happy New Year Denton County Medical Reserve Corps! The old year is complete and we have a brand new one with hardly any footprints on it yet. I thought these words captured my hope and sincere prayer for each one of you in 2010.

*Keep on beginning and failing.  
Each time you fail, start all over again,  
And you will grow stronger until you have  
Accomplished a purpose-not the one  
You began with perhaps, but one  
You'll be glad to remember.  
-Anne Sullivan*

Some of you probably realize that I am a firm believer in dreaming big and doing my best to establish a plan to help accomplish the vision. This year my MRC goal is ambitious, but totally possible. As most of you know, our current team of active Medical Reserve Corps members includes just over 500 members. This year I hope to almost double our current roster. That sounds nearly impossible if I think about all of the radio advertisements, television and movie theater commercials, small groups presentations, and posters it has taken for us to grow our present team over the past three years; but I quickly remember that the growth of our MRC is a team project and I don't have to do this alone. You are our best asset and will be wonderful at recruiting a friend, neighbor, or co-worker because you know everything that is required. Many of you have already sent countless friends and family to join our team. I applaud your enthusiasm and ask that you continue with that kind of effort again this year! We gave you the outline of our growth plan when we introduced the "Plus One" campaign in our last newsletter, but I wanted to fill in a few more details so that you can fully understand the big picture. **The Plus One Campaign is a challenge for each current MRC member to recruit one new person to join our team this year.** We started in August asking participants in our orientations to give me the name of the person that sent them to the training so that we can be sure that the right person receives credit. Each person that recruits someone that actually joins will win an award that will be presented at our Plus One picnic in September. The date and location for this picnic will follow in an upcoming e-mail invitation so stay tuned.



We've spent some time over the last few months focusing on our team roster and identifying seven geographically based regions within the county where we could establish core teams. These core teams would give us the ability to respond to disasters in the local region with the same basic team. You would respond in the area closest to your home and hopefully develop solid working relationships and friendships with your team. We would obviously have multiple backups for each position but as a seasoned team member, you would recognize the people that you have worked with previously and already know what to expect. With this type of set up you would know the Site Directors, Physicians, Triage Team and every other team member that would support you any time our MRC was activated. This standard has always been our goal but we have not previously been

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large enough to even consider this approach. This year, having over 500 members we have moved a little closer to that ideal and our Plus One efforts should allow us to fully implement it!

To help you understand our regions, I am providing a breakout below. All of the cities in our county are not named, but the geographic boundaries should help you identify where you would fall.

*Region 1: Denton*

*Region 2: North Denton County (includes Aubrey, 380 Corridor, Krum, Little Elm, Pilot Point, and Sanger)*

*Region 3: Lake Cities (includes Corinth, Hickory Creek, Lake Dallas, and Shady Shores)*

*Region 4: Lewisville*

*Region 5: Mid Cities (includes Flower Mound, Highland Village, Double Oak, Copper Canyon, Lantana, Bartonville and Argyle)*

*Region 6: Southwest (includes Justin, Trophy Club, Ponder, Roanoke and Keller)*

*Region 7: Southeast (includes Carrollton, Dallas, The Colony, and Frisco)*

All of our regions desperately need more Physicians, Nurse Practitioners, Physician's Assistants and others with prescribing authority. Please note that we also still need Logistics and Supply Managers and Safety Officers in all of our regions. The MRC Training and Tabletop scheduled for February 13, 2010 will cover position descriptions, duties and shortages by region in much detail. Please see the training announcement in this publication.

Please take a few minutes to think about someone that you will tell about the Medical Reserve Corps. Is it someone at work, school, church, another organization or maybe a neighbor? Your next step is to send me their e-mail address so that I can invite them to attend our next orientation.

Your one person will make a huge difference for team, so make 2010 your year to multiply!



## TRAINING ANNOUNCEMENTS

*Saturday, January 30, 2010; 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.*  
Safety Management Training\*

*Saturday, February 13, 2010; 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.*  
MRC Training & Tabletop Exercise\*

*Saturday, March 6, 2010; 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.*  
Translator Training\*

*Thursday, March 16, 2010; 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.*  
MRC Orientation+

*Friday, March 26, 2010; 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.*  
Smallpox Vaccinator Training

*Saturday, May 8, 2010; 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.*  
Shelter Operations Training

*Saturday, May 22, 2010; 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.*  
MRC Orientation+

*Thursday, June 17, 2010; 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.*  
Working with Special Needs Populations

*Saturday, July 10, 2010; 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.*  
Point of Dispensing Exercise\*

*Thursday, July 20, 2010; 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.*  
MRC Orientation+

\*denotes trainings designed specifically for members of the Denton County Medical Reserve Corps

+MRC Orientations only need to be attended by those who would like to join the Denton County Medical Reserve Corps and have not previously completed Denton County MRC Orientation.

For additional details on available trainings, visit [www.dentoncounty.com/heart](http://www.dentoncounty.com/heart).

**MRC Members!** Continue working on the assigned incident command courses provided by FEMA. Required courses: IS-700, IS-100, IS-200, IS-800 All courses available at <http://training.fema.gov/IS/NIMS.asp>.



# Redundant Communication Efforts

Jay Thatcher, HEART Coordinator

“...stand up available customary emergency radio communications channels, including immediate activation of our redundant (MRC) HAM radio communications protocols”.

Virtually all of the county’s health emergency response plans; and undoubtedly most of the plans that have been written nationally by others, include the same or very similar wording (as above). But in a Denton County Health Department emergency response, what exactly do those words mean?

Providing “redundant communications” simply means assuring that when or if all other communications are impeded or fail, the HAM radio operators step in to fill that gap.

Starting in 2005, HEART recognized that we needed this type of communications support and at the urgency of our Emergency Services Director, Jody Gonzalez, we reached out to the various HAM radio organizations across Denton County to educate the operators on our need and, hopefully, fuse a lasting partnership for their support should the need arise.

HAM radio operators stepped up without question and pledged their immediate and enthusiastic assistance. Additionally, many of the HAM club members did even more than that, and were instrumental in joining and helping form a Denton County MRC Coms team-specifically tasked to support any health response.

Based on their enthusiastic pledge of support, HEART used preparedness funding to purchase HAM radio kits and other portable equipment-enough for every Point of Dispensing site-which our dedicated MRC Coms team regularly services, tests at exercises or actual events, and maintains to their highest standard. In addition, the Denton County Health Department donated an infrequently used mobile clinic RV vehicle to County Emergency Services, which the HAM operators have converted into a state-of-the-art communications vehicle capable of rapid and effective deployment anywhere in support of any emergency response communications needs. The vehicle is now affectionately called “Cletus”.



In the process of fulfilling our written plan goals to assure effective and redundant communications in an emergency, it is abundantly clear that HEART could not do this without the tremendous support provided to us by our MRC HAM operators. Their importance to our planning and response efforts are most effectively illustrated by Paul Harvey, world renowned news commentator, as he so aptly stated in one of his broadcasts, HAM radio operators are “America’s [Denton County’s] Quiet Warriors...The legion of HAM radio operators, 700,000+ of them nationally, are always at the ready for backup duty in emergencies-amateur, unpaid, uncelebrated, civilian radio operators, available unselfishly during and after floods, fires, tornadoes and other emergencies” *Paraphrased from a Paul Harvey News and Comments ABC Radio Show, March 19, 2003.*

HEART members are eternally grateful and humbled by our MRC Coms support, perseverance, and commitment.



## Earthquakes Rock Haiti

The Denton County Health Department's HEART Staff would like to express our sympathy to the Haitian people affected by the recent earthquakes.

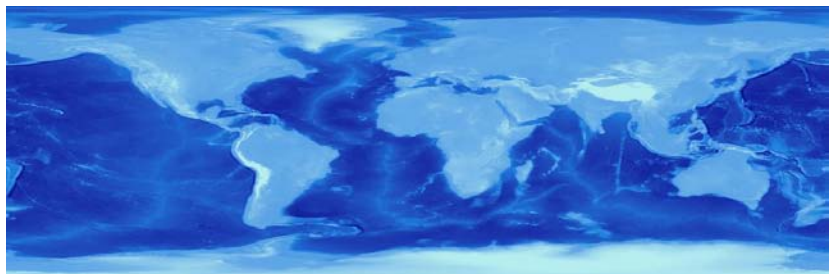
The tragic earthquakes in Haiti have caused all of us to stop and think about ways that we can help the victims. If you would like to be involved in helping the people of Haiti recover from these horrific events, please consider donating to one of the response organizations.

*Here are a few of many options when considering donations to aid Haiti:*

- American Red Cross [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)
- Florida International Volunteer Corps [www.favaca.org](http://www.favaca.org)
- Pan American Development Foundation [www.panamericanrelief.org](http://www.panamericanrelief.org)
- Samaritan's Purse [www.samaritanspurse.org](http://www.samaritanspurse.org)
- UN ReliefWeb [www.reliefweb.int](http://www.reliefweb.int)



Individuals may also donate \$10 to be charged to their cell phone bill by texting "HAITI" to "90999."



In addition to your gifts, please keep Benjamin Korson in your thoughts and prayers. Benjamin is an MRC Site Director and Triage/Vaccinator/Dispenser. He has committed his skills to volunteer for the recovery efforts in Haiti. He leaves on January 22 and will be gone for a month serving the people of Haiti. We are very proud to be associated with such a gifted and selfless individual!

## New Team Member Added to HEART

The Health Emergency Alert Response Team (HEART) has a new addition to the team! Jennifer Ochieng has joined our public health family as the Epidemiology Investigator. Her role with Denton County Health Department is to investigate reports of communicable diseases and to make sure the correct measures are implemented to prevent the spread of disease. In this context she also provides patient education for those impacted by communicable diseases. Jennifer received her Bachelor's degree in Anthropology from the University of North Texas and received her Master's in Public Health from Boston University. Prior to coming to Denton County, Jennifer spent 2 years working in the area of reproductive health in a small town in Kenya, East Africa. Within this framework, she worked on projects that expanded access to safe motherhood practices to reduce maternal mortality and promoted health education, working to reduce the incidence of HIV and other preventable diseases. Her contact information is [Jennifer.ochieng@dentoncounty.com](mailto:Jennifer.ochieng@dentoncounty.com) or (940) 349-2919.

