

Pharmacists and the Medical Reserve Corps

Pharmacists are valuable professionals that are “remarkably underutilized in the U.S. healthcare delivery system given their level of education, training, and access to the community” (Giberson et al, 2011). Not only can pharmacists contribute in traditional healthcare settings, but they can also be an important asset to public health entities. The Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) offers pharmacists opportunities to utilize their unique skill sets to support the health and safety of their communities.

The Medical Reserve Corps is a network of over 200,000 volunteers, organized in almost 1,000 local units across the United States, with a mission to strengthen public health, improve emergency preparedness and response capabilities, and build community resilience. MRC volunteers can contribute to a range of activities, such as providing flu vaccinations, promoting obesity prevention and healthy lifestyles, teaching neighbors how to prepare a disaster kit, and assisting with emergency responses.

MRC’s volunteer pharmacists have demonstrated their value to local communities on many occasions. For instance, MRC pharmacists have provided assistance and information at prescription drug take-back events, administered vaccinations in response to Hepatitis A outbreaks, joined healthcare teams to provide preventive healthcare and health education to vulnerable members of society, guided the proper identification and labeling of medicines in preparation for mass prophylaxis events, staffed functional needs shelters, and vaccinated neighbors and other community members against influenza - including a large-scale response to the H1N1 influenza epidemic in 2009-10.

The MRC can also connect pharmacist members to valuable trainings, oftentimes with continuing education credits. This training improves the pharmacists’ capacity to assist and increases their comfort in being involved. For instance, research has indicated that non-traditional vaccine providers, including pharmacists, have less experience administering vaccines and have indicated that they are less confident in responding during an emergency. A study of 800 vaccine providers in California revealed that a lack of training for emergency response situations reduced their likelihood and comfort level with responding to emergencies. The study authors suggested that additional training opportunities would allow these non-traditional vaccine providers to feel more comfortable responding during a surge (Seiba et al, 2012). The MRC provides a way to train the volunteers, increase their ability to respond, and reduce risks. The trainings may cover a variety of topics, including Point of Dispensing (POD) and Strategic National Stockpile procedures, Incident Command System, Psychological First Aid, and responding to radiological events.

To find out more about the Medical Reserve Corps, please visit <http://1.usa.gov/1gYz5cz>. The “Find MRC Units” page is a great place to start. You can also contact the MRC Program Office (Office of the Surgeon General/Division of the Civilian Volunteer Medical Reserve Corps) at MRCcontact@hhs.gov for information.

References:

Giberson, S., Yoder, S., & Lee, M. (2011). “Improving patient and health system outcomes through advanced pharmacy practice.” A report to the U.S. Surgeon General. Office of the Chief Pharmacist, U.S.

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Seiba, K., Barnett, D., Weiss, P., Omer, S. "Vaccine-related standard of care and willingness to respond to public health emergencies: A cross-sectional survey of California vaccine providers." 2012. *Vaccine*. 31: 196–201.