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5th Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina Puts Focus on Lessons Learned

Rx Response Hailed as a Far Reaching Initiative Triggered by a Critical Public Health Lesson Learned from Hurricane Katrina

Washington, D.C....As the nation prepares to mark the 5th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, emergency managers and public health officials are looking to Rx Response and its efforts to enhance communication and collaboration in the nation's biopharmaceutical supply system as one of the critical public health innovations prompted by the disaster.

Rx Response was created by members of the biopharmaceutical supply system to help ensure the continued flow of medicine to patients following a severe public health emergency. The program's inspiration arose from a key lesson taught by Katrina: the lack of a single point of contact between public health officials and the biopharmaceutical supply system hindered effective communication and coordination. In some cases, shipments of medicine were not allowed past security checkpoints which delayed the availability of medicine for patients. In other instances, efforts by public health officials to learn about the status of medicine shipments and supply required dozens of phone calls to individuals who did not always have the necessary information. With many pharmacies closed in the immediate aftermath of Katrina, this became an even more frustrating obstacle.

"During a disaster, it is vital that systems are in place to assist with the continued delivery of medicines to hospitals, healthcare providers and patients in need," said Chris Singer, Executive Vice President of the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA). "Among the necessary systems are established channels that will allow fast communication between the right parties in both public health and emergency management and within the biopharmaceutical supply system. Rx Response provides this previously unavailable channel and in doing so has become an invaluable new tool for our nation's emergency managers and public health professionals who share the same goal with the biopharmaceutical supply system which is to help patients during times of crisis."

The Rx Response program includes the pharmaceutical and biotechnology manufacturing industries as well as healthcare distributors, community pharmacies and hospitals – all of whom play a role in delivering medicines to patients. The group also includes the American Red Cross – and all of the partners actively work with the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Homeland Security to manage this program. Additionally, the partnership has worked with state emergency management agencies to further develop the program to help support the continued delivery of medications to patients whose health may be threatened during a crisis.

Medicines to patients in times of emergency

The Rx Response partnership includes the American Hospital Association, Biotechnology Industry Organization, Generic Pharmaceutical Association, Healthcare Distribution Management Association, National Association of Chain Drug Stores, National Community Pharmacists Association and the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America. Collectively, the members of these organizations donated millions of dollars in cash and large quantities of medicine to the people impacted by Katrina. It is estimated that approximately \$4 million has been spent by PhRMA to fund the development of Rx Response over the past four years.

"As we refined the model for Rx Response, we met with the key Louisiana public health officials who were dealing with the impact of Katrina first hand to learn from their experience so we could design Rx Response to fit the needs of those who would be using this new resource," said Erin Mullen, R.Ph, Ph.D., Director of Rx Response.

Members of Biopharmaceutical Supply Chain Faced Unique Obstacles in Katrina

Each Rx Response member faced their own unique challenges leading up to and immediately following Hurricane Katrina. The members of the Healthcare Distribution Management Association (HDMA) distribute 85% of all pharmaceuticals sold in the United States to more than 165,000 dispensing locations. Many of these companies took a number of steps prior to Katrina's landfall to better prepare for the disaster. "Our members were able to rely on their emergency plans and local experience to prepare their response," said Perry Fri, HDMA's Senior Vice President, Industry Relations, Membership & Education. "Within hours of the storm ending, distributors were in the affected areas serving their customers, while also supporting state and federal response efforts." Despite pre-storm efforts, such obstacles as security checkpoints and severe flooding had to be overcome to deliver medicines where they were needed. One HDMA member used helicopters to help resupply hospital pharmacies, which were struggling to treat patients in the post Katrina environment.

"A large amount of advanced planning allowed our members to continue the critical work they do every day – delivering medicines. With Rx Response in place, our ability to help an area recover from a disaster is even greater," said Fri. Among those facing the greatest challenges following Katrina were the pharmacies, hospitals and clinics that struggled to meet patient needs. Many community pharmacies relied on generator power to sustain basic operations. The absence of phone or internet access made processing prescriptions impossible in some cases. John and Wendy McKinney, husband and wife pharmacy owners and members of the National Community Pharmacists Association (NCPA), started filling prescriptions three days after Katrina hit and the water receded. They hooked up a generator and placed a card table by the back door for people who needed prescriptions refilled. Their computers were up, but the phone lines weren't so filing claims was out of the question. "For 10 days, we didn't charge," said John McKinney. "We gave everybody a week's worth of medicine," Wendy said. "If you had a bottle and could tell us what you were on and needed it, and it wasn't a narcotic, it didn't matter what drug store the bottle came from."

Hospital officials learned a great deal as a result of Hurricane Katrina about the importance of pre-disaster planning in addressing the unique challenges a hospital will face in a hurricane. These challenges include decisions associated with evacuations and how to effectively manage an evacuation. Other challenges relate to ensuring that enough medications are on hand to meet patient needs until a hospital pharmacy can be re-supplied. "The incredible scale and devastation of



Hurricane Katrina has spurred hospital leaders to take pre-disaster planning to a new level," said Rich Umbdenstock, president and CEO, American Hospital Association. "The lessons learned indicated a need for a cooperative approach that includes preparation and planning from local associates, supply distribution centers, as well as the federal stockpile. Rx Response has played a very important role in enabling the American Hospital Association to educate others in health care about the unique challenges facing hospitals in a disaster. This dialogue and collaboration has helped ensure that our member hospitals are better prepared to meet patient needs in future disasters."

For Rx Response Coordinating Body member BIO, Rx Response plays a particularly vital role for its members. "Our manufacturers produce biologic medicines, such as vaccines, which quite often require constant refrigeration as the medicine moves between the manufacturer to the distributor and ultimately from the pharmacist to the patient," explained Phyllis Arthur, BIO's Senior Director for Immunizations, Immunotherapeutics and Diagnostics Policy. "This complexity makes it especially important that a resource like Rx Response be in place so that transportation logistics are addressed before a disaster."

Rx Response Coordinating Body member GPhA also welcomes the contribution Rx Response has made to helping ensure the flow of medicine to patients following a disaster. "Generic medicines account for a large percentage of the prescriptions filled in the United States," said Shawn Brown, GPhA Vice President of State Government Affairs. "This makes it extremely important to us to do all we can to ensure the sustainability of the supply chain during an emergency. One of the steps we can take on this front is to actively support Rx Response in helping to get medicine to patients in times of need."

Since Initial Inception, Rx Response Capabilities Continue to Build

Another important development in the Katrina-inspired Rx Response program came during the 2008 hurricane season when Rx Response officials realized after Hurricanes Gustav and Ike how important their status reports detailing which pharmacies had re-opened were to emergency management officials. The new reports gave public health officials first-of-its-kind status reports about a vital public health asset that had restored its service to the public. The reports also enabled emergency room physicians and American Red Cross Disaster Health Services workers to send people in need of prescriptions to available pharmacies. "In a major disaster, we have the potential to shelter thousands of people and many need prescriptions. Having access to information about open pharmacies helps Red Cross clients get timely access to life sustaining medications," said Dee Yeater, American Red Cross.

Rx Response's *Pharmacy Status Reporting Tool* was anchored in the frequent post-storm communications occurring between Rx Response and its members, including the National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS) and the National Community Pharmacists Association (NCPA). Both NACDS and NCPA were monitoring reports from their member companies' stores and sharing that information with Rx Response officials who in turn provided it to federal and state emergency management agencies.



Inspired by the success of its largely manual process of reporting open pharmacies, Rx Response officials realized they could significantly enhance this reporting capacity by using electronic records processing data to identify a pharmacy that was open following a hurricane. This realization was based on the assumption that if a pharmacy was transmitting billing claims, it was most likely open for business.

"The *Pharmacy Status Reporting Tool* has enabled NACDS to identify which of its member pharmacies were operating in disaster-stricken areas so that patients impacted by the disaster could access pharmacy services. This unprecedented capability significantly enhanced the value proposition for Rx Response, not only directly with patients but with emergency management and public health officials," said NACDS President and Chief Executive Officer Steven C. Anderson, IOM, CAE. "As the face of neighborhood healthcare, pharmacy is a front-line healthcare provider, and NACDS is pleased to work with Rx Response."

"While Katrina commemorations will lament the loss of life and other adverse impacts from the storm, they will surely focus on the rebuilding that has taken place in New Orleans and the many other positive outcomes," said Rx Response's Erin Mullen. "Those of us who developed Rx Response take pride in knowing that when the next disaster strikes, we will be able to help the affected community get back on its feet much faster by helping to get medicine to patients in need."

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