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Healthcare Emergency Planning Group Busy Addressing Many Aspects Related to Emergency Preparedness and Response

The Southeast Idaho Regional Healthcare System Planning Group, is part of the nationwide Hospital Preparedness Program, and has received grant funding totaling \$244,527. The purpose of the federal grant funding from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response is to help hospitals prepare for disasters and focuses on the areas of interoperable communications systems, bed tracking, personnel management, fatality management planning and hospital evacuation planning. Hospitals, community health centers, and EMS partners worked in the past five years to improve bed and personnel surge capacity, decontamination capabilities, isolation capacity, pharmaceutical supplies, training, education, drills and exercises.

Denise O'Farrell, Emergency Preparedness Healthcare Liaison for the Southeastern District Health Department, has coordinated efforts for the group for the past four years. "This group works exceptionally well together creating regional plans for emergency response to situations causing their facilities a large influx of patients that could potentially overwhelm their capabilities. We have two full-scale exercises being planned this year that will allow them to test their capabilities and train with the equipment that has been purchased over the past few years."

One exercise being held in Caribou County on April 16th will test the process and procedures to activate and deploy Mass Casualty Incident Trailers stocked with medical equipment and supplies purchased with grant funding. The second exercise, being held on July 30-31 is in the early planning stages, with the scenario based on pandemic influenza that overwhelms not only the healthcare system, but also the funeral homes and coroners with mass fatalities. "It will be a complicated exercise in that there are complex issues still challenging public health and healthcare professionals alike. Pandemic flu will severely burden the healthcare system, not only because they will not have enough bed space to treat all of the ill, but they will have personnel out sick as well," says O'Farrell. "People often have the attitude that 'it's not going to happen here' but this group is working together in the event that it does happen, because it is better to answer some of the difficult questions now versus when a real emergency occurs."

For information about this and many other events SDHD is offering, please see our Calendar of Events page on www.sdhdidaho.org