

PHARMACY PRACTICE NEWS

WEB EXCLUSIVES

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ASHP Coverage: Group Launches Flu Readiness Resource Center

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ROSEMONT, ILL—With the World Health Organization's pandemic declaration still fresh, the ASHP Research and Education Foundation unveiled its new Pandemic Readiness and Emergency Preparedness Resource Center at the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists' Summer Meeting.

The Web-based center features the foundation's Pandemic Influenza Assessment Tool for Health-System Pharmacy Departments, along with other pandemic information resources.

Designed by a panel of experts, the pandemic assessment tool gives pharmacy directors and others worried about the resurgence of a more virulent flu strain the chance to test their departments' readiness and to see how well their preparedness plans are plugged into those of their institutions and the community as a whole.

"It's fair to say that overall emergency preparedness planning, as well as planning specifically for pandemic influenza, has been a challenge for departments of pharmacy and for hospitals and health systems in general," said Daniel J. Cobaugh, PharmD, FAACP, DABAT, senior director for research and preparations at the ASHP Foundation.

With that in mind, Dr. Cobaugh said, the foundation's aim was to give pharmacy leaders the resources to help "drive emergency planning and ultimately provide better care when an event occurs."

The 61 questions that make up the pandemic assessment tool are designed to drill down into a wide range of leadership, staffing, education and communication issues as well as concerns about accessibility and distribution of medications and supplies during a full-blown emergency.

One member of the foundation's expert panel, Victor Cohen, PharmD, BCPS, CGP, CMI-V, clinical pharmacy manager in the Department of Emergency Medicine and Pharmaceutical Services at Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn, N.Y., told Pharmacy Practice News that "the tool allows for a more coordinated, smart response. It allows pharmacy directors to make the most efficient use of their staffs and supplies."

Noting that that departments of health and other agencies "have become much better in coordinating response to emergencies—at least in New York City," Dr. Cohen said that "this tool allows you to start the process of opening lines of communication to local, state and federal agencies."

At Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago, Elizabeth M. Gorski, PharmD, MBA, used the assessment tool during her residency administration rotation when she was asked to compare the hospital's antiviral medication stockpile against what the needs might be in a future pandemic.

"It was a large task," Dr. Gorski said. "I was in communication with the Department of Public Health and with different suppliers. I used the tool to assess and plug in the various numbers relating to staff needs and those of any immediate family members, and, depending on the level of

pandemic severity, the needs of different patient populations to help predict what an adequate supply would be for us. The tool was useful as a gauge."

The announcement of the foundation's new pandemic resource center came on the heels of a recent report on the public response to the H1N1 outbreak, which showed how much remained to be done to avoid a catastrophe if a virulent strain were to emerge. The report, titled "Pandemic Flu: Lessons from the Frontlines," stated that although "U.S. officials executed strong coordination and communication and ability to adapt to changing circumstances," the outbreak also suggested "how quickly the nation's core public health capacity would be overwhelmed if an outbreak were more severe or widespread."

In addition to the assessment tool, the foundation's new resource center contains links to other sources of timely information, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization as well as RSS feeds offering continually updated reports on pandemic developments.

Since its original launch a year ago, approximately 250 individuals have accessed the assessment tool. Dr. Cobaugh said he was encouraged by the response so far. "As a percentage of the total number of hospitals, it's a relatively small number," he said, "but what we can say that we've influenced preparedness practice in over 250 departments of pharmacy across the country."

Dr. Cobaugh said the H1N1 outbreak had served as a "wake-up call. Awareness is very heightened at this point, and departments of pharmacy and hospitals and health systems across the country are being much more vigilant about their preparedness. So it's a good time to introduce the new resource center."

Dr. Cohen said pharmacies "really need to focus" on preparing their operations for a possible pandemic, including making sure that standard dosing charts are available for children, adults, the elderly and patients with renal dysfunction.

He said hospitals also need to determine who is going to dispense medications "when patients come to the hospital. Is the inpatient pharmacy going to fill or is the patient going to be referred to an outpatient pharmacy? Will the patient be assured of getting Tamiflu [Roche] in the outpatient setting?"

Additionally, he said, vial labels need to be preprinted, especially for pediatric suspensions, and patient instructions needed to be printed in all languages that patients are likely to understand.

Finally, he said, providers should understand that flu can present atypically—at Maimonides there was a lot of nausea and vomiting connected with the H1N1 outbreak—and should expect the unexpected at all times."