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Warren's medical group undergoes exercise mass emergency test to go Air Force wide

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8/28/2008 - **FE WARREN AFB, WYO.** -- Members of the 90th Medical Group participated in a week-long exercise that culminated Friday with a mass casualty scenario to test their skills. The scenario, which involved a truck spraying airborne Anthrax throughout the base, allowed medical personnel to practice first responder, decontamination, injury prioritization and other medical care skills.

"We have to be ready to treat mass casualties under extreme conditions," said Col. Brian Hayes, 90th Medical Group commander. "There's really no other way to know if we have the skills and assets to accomplish this without these practices."

In addition to what might be considered "normal" emergency needs, Colonel Hayes said decontamination and quarantine processes are hurdles that face care providers from those on scene to those in the clinic.

"Since 9/11, medical providers everywhere have had to take into consideration limiting exposure to chemical and biological attacks between those contaminated and those trying to help," said Colonel Hayes. "For us, the weather and wind cause other issues when dealing with these scenarios and we have to work around those to make sure we don't increase the emergency through cross contamination."

One way the medical group contends with the elements is by having its decontamination area in a building physically separated from the main clinic. This allows for decon operations to take place anytime they're needed. This was a change from the way some medical personnel are used to doing business.

"Coming from Texas, I'm used to the decon area being in a tent next to the scene of the accident or attack," said Tech. Sgt. Bobbie Martin, 90th MDG. "That's not always possible with Wyoming winds and weather."

As each of the 100-plus volunteer "victims" were decontaminated, medical personnel prioritized the level of injury by "minor, immediate and emergent" to get the victims stabilized as quickly as possible.

"As with any emergency room, we have to quickly assess injuries and treat the more critical quickly," said Colonel Hayes. "Those with the most minor injuries may have to wait a little longer but we still want to get them treated so they can help us care for others. Because in a scenario like this one, we will need all the hands we can get."



The In-Place Patient Decontamination team processes patients through decontamination to remove any hazardous chemical contact before admitting the people into the clinic for treatment by the other response teams. The Medical Emergency Response Capabilities and Assessment Training included most of the 90th Medical Group and more than 150 volunteer patients. (Photo by Bernie Ernst)

Base medical personnel also teamed with local ambulance services to exercise transport of victims and supplies to and from area hospitals.

"Certainly the more you practice with sister organizations, the more streamlined your procedures will be in the event of a real-world event," said Colonel Hayes. "Our area medical community has a great relationship with each other and these exercises allow us to work together with them so we are all prepared whether something happens on-base or off.

"With as close-knit as the base and Cheyenne are, being able to work as one team during a catastrophe benefits the whole community."