WATCHING OVER THE VULNERABLE

A system was rapidly deployed to keep track of the many long-term care facility residents evacuated during Hurricane Sandy.

Hurricane Sandy was in full fury. One senior staffer had been at the New York City Health Department's Gotham Center headquarters for days, working nonstop. Finally home, he fed the cat and got into bed. Five hours later, the phone rang. His colleague apologized, and then told him to come back to the office.

There were 1,800 nursing home and adult care residents evacuating, some through second-story windows in Coney Island, the staffer, a lead planner, recalled. Some left in boats. There was little time to gather their things, including medical records, medications, or—if they had them—cell phones. With staff sparse, many of these patients—frail, ill or suffering from dementia—would temporarily stay at Special Medical Needs Shelters (SMNSs) throughout NYC, where workers did everything they could to keep them accounted for and safe.

The Health Department response staff had 24 hours to devise a tracking system to clearly identify these people and track their locations so that concerned family members would know where they were staying.

A team of Health Department planners and information technology experts created a centralized system to gather personal data from the facility residents within shelters, keep track of each individual's whereabouts and facilitate

reunification with families and friends. By morning, the Long-Term Care Tracker went live.

The Health Department staff and NYC Medical Reserve Corps volunteers were deployed to the shelters around the clock, where they went from bed to bed repeatedly gleaning and correcting information. The data were sent to the Long-Term Care Tracker database and updated every four hours. Calls from families to 311 were forwarded to the Health Department call center. Within two days, almost every name and its accompanying location was entered into the system.

On the fly, the Health Department built the framework for an instrument that will help locate the vulnerable going forward. Currently under development is the New York City Emergency Patient Search Portal, a web-based tool that can retrieve real-time location information for patients and help families find each other during or after a disaster.

1,800
nursing home and adult care facility residents were evacuated to Special Medical Needs Shelters.

In 24 hours the Health Department built a system to track these evacuees.

After 19 days of nonstop work, **250 families** were reunited.

NYC Public Health and Healthcare Preparedness and Response REPORT

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A Special Medical Needs Shelter in Brooklyn that helped residents from nursing homes and adult care facilities who were evacuated during Sandy. HHS Photo.

Impact

- Preparedness staff developed an electronic survey used in Special Medical Needs Shelters (SMNSs) to track approximately 1,800 residents evacuated from nursing homes and adult care facilities during Hurricane Sandy. The system:
  - Was created in 24 hours.
  - Was the only tracking system available during the storm to connect loved ones with evacuated long-term care residents.
- 101 Health Department staff and 22 Medical Reserve Corps volunteers staffed 7 SMNSs around the clock for 19 days to facilitate family reunification.
- Approximately 250 families were reunited with their loved ones.

Critical Need

- Further develop and implement a centralized system to facilitate family reunification after a disaster. This meets a critical public need and substantially reduces the burden on responder resources and healthcare facilities.

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