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First-Hand Report On Aftermath Of Joplin Tornadoes From Members

After a Category EF5 tornado ravaged St. John's Mercy Regional Medical Center and the residents of Joplin, Missouri on May 22, we contacted the NPPA members who work in facilities close to Joplin, to reach out in sympathy as well as to see if they had any firsthand experience from it that we could interview them on and they could report on, in hopes their fellow Pharmacy Buyers across the country could learn and be better prepared in the event of such a disaster in their area.

Initially, **NPPA Member Theresa Gunderson**, the Pharmacy Inventory Manager of St. John's Regional Health Center in Springfield, Missouri, reported back briefly: "The impact was felt strongly in our Pharmacy, because St John's Joplin is our sister hospital in the Sisters of Mercy Organization, so we were called on to help."

Then we heard from **NPPA Member & Conference Attendee Leanne Witt**, the Pharmacy Buyer for Cox Walnut Lawn Hospital also in Springfield, Missouri; and her colleague **Michelle Hurst**, the Pharmacy Buyer at Cox South Hospital in Springfield, who were both involved at their facilities in the efforts for procuring emergency medications and supplies that were needed, immediately after the tornado hit that night on a weekend, as well as putting in extra hours.

Initially, Leanne responded (on June 9), with the following note: "Yes it has been a terrible time for southwest Missouri residents; we did operate under disaster mode for about 72 hours. Our buying team will be glad to share our experiences during this time. It not only affected our jobs but we have a pharmacist that lost his home in Joplin. I also volunteered to help cleanup in Joplin over last weekend. It is unbelievable the damage that was caused when you see it firsthand. So we are working shorthanded this week (what else is new?!). But our Cox South facility's Pharmacy Buyer, Michelle Hurst and I, have just made plans to sit down and compile an article for you as soon as we're able (based on the questions you laid out for us). I should be a great learning tool."

Here follows their comments to the questions we posed.

• **Were you called in to work extra hours due to this disaster?** We were contacted to be on standby shortly after the tornado hit the hospital in Joplin. Since Michelle lives 7 minutes from her facility, she was the first one called. At 8pm that evening we started operating under Disaster Level 1, and by 11 pm we were a Level 2. Michelle was called 2 times during the night, but she was able to explain to the supervisor on hand the steps that needed to be done.

• **Did you run out of critical drugs or did you always have enough due to help from wholesalers and other vendor representatives?** We had enough products to meet the requested items. The wholesaler for the Joplin hospitals (AmerisourceBergen) made a delivery that night to Joplin (on a Sunday, May 22), to help ensure they had what they needed. Then on Monday morning, we had several other drug reps call and check to see if they could do anything to help procure product for us; which we greatly appreciated.

- **Which drugs were, or should have been, most important to have an extra supply of?** Items being requested Sunday night were morphine injectable and antibiotics. Monday we saw multiple requests for Adacel®, Decavac™, tetanus toxoid, and also Novo7®; the patients needed the product before it could be delivered from the manufacturer. We were able to order enough product from our wholesaler to keep our stock levels at par and provide to the disaster area in Joplin. Our facility sent several physicians, NP's, and nurses to the area.

One thing we had not thought about ever before, in terms of what may happen and what might be needed special after a disaster occurs, was the influx of extra utility workers in the weeks after the event; we have a clinic which has had to place orders for Adacel and Twinrix® several times.

- **Were you able to work regular hours or did you have to work beyond your normal work schedule?** We were able to work normal hours, putting minor work on the back burner and taking care of other issues at hand. The first week after the tornado was especially very hectic, with the extra patient load and medication requests.

- **How might the concept of “Disaster Preparedness” differ from the actuality of experiencing a true disaster such as this? Can a buyer truly ever be adequately prepared?** Yes, we think so. If you keep your cool, you will generally get everything done that you need. A suggestion would be to put your emergency file on a flash drive and store it in a safe place (and/or print it out to have in hard copy form); and to have the phone numbers that you need updated on a regular basis and have a copy of your departments' phone tree available as well. We both have computer access from home already, in case we need to log in from there on off-hours to place an emergency order. The more accessible the Pharmacy is to the buying team, the better. After all, we are the ones that know where and how the drugs and supplies are obtained. Also, it's good to have a list of what types of drugs could be used in different disaster situations.

- **Do you have any specific advice for other Pharmacy Buyers about how they can prepare for such circumstances?** The realization that this situation was real, set in early during the week. No cell service to the area hit by the tornado, and only 1 landline to Freeman, the remaining hospital in Joplin, made it hard for communications. Texts to cell phones were going through during the first week, but at a delayed rate.

- **Did any of your neighboring hospitals help or were involved in this disaster relief effort?** Yes, the Southwest Missouri healthcare community stepped up to help those in need. All Springfield hospitals as well as hospitals in Neosho and Carthage (in Missouri) took in Joplin patients. There were even reports of patients being sent to Kansas City (in Missouri as well but further away), and even Tulsa, Oklahoma hospitals as well.

Editor's Note: Thanks to both Leanne and Michelle for taking time out of their busy schedules, to share this information with our NPPA members, as we are sure it will be of interest and assistance to you all, in hopes of being able to be better prepared in your facilities, in case of disaster or emergency such as this.

Also note: see Leanne Witt as a speaker at the 2011 NPPA Conference this August 15-18, in the Best Buyer Practices panel session.

Lastly, see the below news about a temporary hospital setup across from the old one. Also now available: additional Mercy patient care locations in the Joplin area. Find details provided via a quick link, from the PharmacyPurchasing.com home page's “What's New” section.

New Joplin MO Hospital Location Open After Tornado

On May 31, St. John's Mercy announced they had a temporary hospital facility open for business, across the parking lot from the tornado-ravaged St. John's Mercy Regional Medical Center. The new St. John's Mercy Hospital will be in operation until a more permanent facility can be constructed. That still-to-be constructed facility will then become the temporary home until a new hospital campus is built.

The temporary facility has an emergency department, surgical suites, MRI and CT scan capabilities, pharmacy, and 60 inpatient beds. **Dr. Bob Dodson**, who is working to help set up the temporary hospital, said: "Six days after the event, we're up and running. This hospital will allow us to do everything we could do within St. John's, only on a smaller scale. Right now we're offering 60 inpatient beds and we can expand if we need to, if our community needs dictate that. The damaged building is not St. John's. St. John's is the people who worked in that building. And they are going to be the people in this (new) building."

The new St. John's Mercy Hospital is built to withstand 100 mile-per-hour winds, but on the inside, it has all of the comforts of most hospitals. **Marilyn Welling**, St. John's Mercy Nurse, said: "We'll be able to do everything we need for patients we see here. We'll make sure they are able to get their medicines and the treatments they need. Their wounds will be cared for and their daily needs will be met, vital signs monitored, telemetry, lab work, all of that will be done."

Mercy's electronic health record system is back online connecting the new hospital and all Mercy sites of service. St. John's Mercy Hospital also will be connected to Mercy's electronic health record system. Dr. Dodson commented: "Our electronic health record contains all of the records of our patients before the storm. We don't have to worry about losing a paper chart or having it damaged by water or rain."

Many of Mercy's specialists are serving from Memorial Hall while more permanent locations are found. Mercy Clinic patients (who are affiliated with St. John's Regional Medical Center), may visit their physicians at a variety of locations around the Joplin area.