F51 Comprehensive Disaster Preparedness and New York City's Medical Examiner Special Operations Response Team (MESORT): A Forensic Odontologist's Perspective

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The goal of this presentation is to brief attendees on the New York City's Medical Examiner Special Operations Response Team (MESORT). The attendee will be exposed to NYC's multidisciplinary approach to emergency management and its multi-faceted training protocol.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by discussing how mass fatality incidents come from many sources; terrorist attacks, hurricanes, earthquakes, and pandemic influenza events, and how municipalities need to be prepared. This presentation will expose the attendees to year round training drills New York City undergoes and how forensic odontology plays a key role in the New York City's multidisciplinary approach to disaster management. These risks are universal and therefore its usefulness in the field of forensics and its impact on humanity is incalculable.

As part of its disaster preparedness program, New York City's Office of Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) has developed a multidisciplinary team to respond to and manage mass fatality incidents. Funded with Department of Homeland Security grant funds, the federal mandate for this program is to not only cover a terrorist attacks, but to take and all hazards approach in dealing with other incidents such as hurricanes, earthquakes, or pandemic influenza events. An essential element of this plan is New York City's Medical Examiner Special Operations Response Team (MESORT) program. This presentation will give a brief overview of MESORT and cover some of the key elements of preparation, training, and mock disaster drills to insure an organized and effective deployment in the event of an incident. It will also discuss the role the role forensic odontologist plays as part of this multidisciplinary response team.

Thousands of person-hours have gone into design, coordination, and implementation of specific response plans for MESORT operation. The fundamental component of MESORT operations are preparedness and training. MESORT training consists of multiple annual drills deployed in numerous areas. Drills are divided into three types: Family Assistant Center, Disaster Mortuary Operations, and Field Investigative/Recovery Operations. Additionally, a critical aspect of these drills incorporates Management Information Services (MIS) and the deployment of critical computer hardware and software components.

Family assistance center drills are performed at specially designated locations throughout the city often near major transportation hubs such as airports. This program is coordinated with multiple local and federal agencies including New York City Office of Emergency Management, New York City's Police Department, and the Department of Environmental Protection, the Department Of Transportation, as well as numerous other city agencies. Federal agencies include National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), Department of Defense (DOD), and the Department of Homeland Security.

Disaster Mortuary Operational preparedness involves exercises conducted at one of five New York City medical examiner facilities. These drills test the preparedness of each facility to handle a sudden increase in volume as well as the ability to distribute the work force if necessary. Again, coordination with other city and federal agencies is a crucial component of this disaster drill.

Finally, a crucial part of MESORT operation is Field Investigative/Recovery Operational training. The ability to deploy a field mortuary to deal with potentially hazardous remains is crucial. The presentation will cover this process including the HazMat components necessary to insure the safety of MESORT personnel. Additional discussion will include the special equipment developed for Field Operations.

Another key component of MESORT operations is the Pandemic Influenza (PI) Surge Plan for In and Out of Hospital Deaths. The planning assumptions are based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) estimates of a PI event fatality scenario. This plan coordinated OCME's efforts with local Health Care Facilities (HCFs) to assists in the removal, tracking and temporary storage of decedents. Through the use of strategically placed Body Collection Points (BCPs) of refrigerated storage units the MESORT is responsible to aid HCFs by providing temporary storage, track decedents under their responsibility, and to release decedents to private sector entities (e.g., funeral directors and crematorium owners) without delay or perform city-directed burial of decedents when necessary.

The lifeline of the MESORT operation is its Management Information System (MIS) division. This presentation will cover some of the deployment specifications as well as the difficulties in deploying a complete technology infrastructure in New York City within hours of arriving at a location. A discussion of connectivity requirements as well as field-testing of MIS systems will be covered. In addition, review of communication cooperation agreements with the Department of Defense and Homeland Security utilizing their terrestrial and satellite communications infrastructure to ensure backup communications capability will be presented.

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A brief discussion of updates to the Unified Victim Identification System (UVIS) and the UVIS Dental Identification Module (UDIM) as it relates to disaster operations will also be presented. This software is the key component of the MESORT operation and its role as the integration of a multidisciplinary approach to mass fatality management cannot be overemphasized.

The presentation will conclude with a discussion of the MESORT multidisciplinary approach to disaster management. A critical component of this approach was the inclusion of Forensic Odontologist in the process and the seamless integration of dentistry in the identification at process. **MESORT, UVIS, UDIM - UVIS**

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