

MENTAL HEALTH PLAYERS SCENARIOS

Background:

A Pneumonic Plague outbreak, caused by terrorists, has occurred in New Jersey. Pneumonic Plague is a contagious illness that can be spread from person-to-person. [Please see attached “Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) About Plague”] Many people have become ill, a number of them dying. The Governor has ordered that all residents of New Jersey should get prophylactic antibiotics to protect themselves and others from getting sick. To get them, people have to go to PODs (Point of Distribution Centers), also known as DVCs (Dispensing/Vaccination Clinics). These centers receive medication that has been stockpiled by the United States Government. There is enough medication stockpiled for every person in the United States and is available, free of charge, at the POD/DVC to anyone who needs it. A POD/DVC is a temporary clinic that may be located at a local school, church, etc. The people coming to the POD/DCV will be encountering Pharmacists who will be dispensing the medication and Social Workers who will be seeing to their emotional needs.

Scenarios:

#1 An individual comes into the POD/DVC very nervous. He/she is worried that there won't be enough medicine for him/her by the time he/she gets to the Pharmacist. While he/she waits, the anxiety increases and he/she gets verbally loud and disruptive, asking/shouting to staff for reassurance that there is still medicine left. This behavior is starting to affect other people in the POD/DVC, causing them to become agitated. Staff has requested that he/she lower his/her voice and wait for his/her turn.

Object of Exercise: What should be done to reassure this individual and calm him/her down?

#2 An individual receives his/her medicine from the Pharmacist. The Pharmacist has briefly explained what the medicine is for, when to take it, how much to take, and how many days the medicine should be taken. The individual keeps getting confused about the dosage and the Pharmacist keeps trying to clarify the information. The individual gets more and more upset, feeling that he/she will get sick and die if the medicine isn't taken correctly. Meanwhile, a line begins to back up and other people are getting restless.

Object of Exercise: How can the individual be assisted to understand the instructions without further delaying the process of medication dispensing?

Some mental health concerns that should be considered:

- The public's concern relating to exposure and safety in the POD.
- The public's incomplete knowledge of what's happening as events unfold.
- Conflicting expert opinions relating to treatment expressed by the media.
- The perceived mismatch of government action vs. public expectations.
- The reluctance of the public to follow health directives if they don't feel ill.