

**Oregon Public Health Division
MEDICAL ADVISORY GROUP
NEWSLETTER**

The Oregon Medical Advisory Group (MAG) held its 4th of 6 scheduled meetings at the Oregon Dental Association on February 6. The Medical Advisory Group has been convened to assist the state in developing guidelines for decisions in emergencies such as allocation of scarce resources and altered standards of care. The MAG includes approximately 24 representatives of major health care, health professional organizations, tribal organizations, academia, and local government. During this meeting, members continued refinement of the ethical framework developed at the previous meeting, identifying issues that need to be addressed and discussing how the framework could be used in emergencies for making decisions about allocation of scarce medical resources and altered standards of care .

To gain further experience with the draft framework, MAG members considered the 2004 Influenza Vaccine experience. During that year, a significant vaccine shortage resulted from failure of an English vaccine manufacturing firm's production, resulting initially in the availability of only 54 million doses for the entire U.S. The approach taken by the Public Health Division was discussed, with particular attention paid to the ethical challenges that were faced, the comments of providers and the public about the approach used, and lessons learned.

MAG members worked through three scenarios involving disasters to determine how responses could be guided by the ethical framework. The scenarios included pandemic influenza, a robust earthquake, and a significant chemical spill. Use of the scenarios highlighted the challenges in making real time decisions that would be faced by hospital administrators, emergency room physicians, law enforcement, other healthcare providers, as well as the public.

What is clear is that during large scale emergencies, standards of care would begin to shift and would need to include "contextual triage" more akin to that provided on a battlefield. Moreover, survival of communities through continued operation of critical services such as electricity, water, law enforcement, and healthcare in communities would become a priority. In this context, medical standards of care would need to shift from a focus on providing services to individuals as they present for care to supporting a strategy focused on survival of the community. Ethical challenges to be faced in those circumstances abound. The ethical framework being developed by MAG is unique, with nothing in the current literature providing practical guidance for ethical challenges during disasters. The framework will be of significant importance in guiding difficult decisions during emergencies that may be encountered in the future.

The MAG now has links to its pages on the Oregon Public Health Emergency Preparedness website, found at <http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/preparedness/>. Meeting minutes, agendas and other information can be found on that site.