



Frank R. Howard Memorial Hospital

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Disaster Strikes

Howard Memorial Hospital and Community Respond to Emergency Disaster Drill

Willits – On November 15, 2006 Howard Memorial Hospital and Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) responded to the statewide Medical and Health Disaster Exercise.

“Imagine if we had to respond to a major earthquake with a magnitude of 7.9 lasting 60 seconds,” stated Rinda Simi, the hospital’s Education and Disaster Preparedness Coordinator. In the scenario, the shake is felt from the Oregon border to Los Angeles. Road slides block main roads into Willits, structures have totally to partially collapsed, and ruptured gas mains have started many fires in the streets and in buildings. Telephone services including cell phones are very spotty.

“We could assume that our hospital would need to respond under very difficult circumstances,” stated Simi. “We probably would have poor communication, and the hospital probably would have severe damage. In addition, we would need to prepare for up to 20 times the patient count.”

Medical staff and CERT’s were called early in the morning and asked to assist in the drill. “The community really stepped up to the plate,” said Simi. “Our ER Manager, Jessica Knapp, arranged for the CERT teams to work with the hospital. We had CERT’s from Ukiah, Brooktrails and Willits.” The CERT teams are trained in basic first aid and emergency response.

Plant operations team under the guidance of Tom Peterson immediately reviewed the hospital for damage. Additional nurses and doctors arrived to assist in the growing number of victims. Hospital administrators arrived to coordinate the emergency response from the command center.

A triage team was stationed outside the hospital to meet victims and determine the most urgent cases. A large tent was erected to receive overflow patients, and roads were blocked behind the hospital to provide for parking and insure a flow of emergency vehicles.



Inside the emergency room staff took care of victims played by community members. Dr. Charles Hott led out the medical team. “We’re lucky to have Dr. Hott,” stated Simi.

“He volunteered his time to assist Hurricane Katrina victims, and gained valuable knowledge. His experience is invaluable at all times, and especially in times of emergency”



Ham operator and CERT volunteer, John Lemmer, turned on the hospital’s Ham Radio and began communicating with several other county operators. The Ham radio gives the hospital additional communication tools in addition to it’s hand held radios and Med Line 1.

After the two-hour drill came to a close, Kevin Erich, President of the hospital met with CERT and hospital staff to review the strengths and weaknesses of the operation. “We have areas of improvement,” said Erich to the group. “However we can be proud of all who participated in this drill today.” The hospital and community will continue to participate in emergency drills in order to provide the most efficient response possible when, and if, a real disaster strikes.

Frank R. Howard Memorial Hospital is part of Adventist Health, a not-for-profit faith –based health system operating in California, Hawaii, Oregon and Washington. Founded on the Seventh-day Adventist legacy of Christian health care, Adventist Health is composed of 20 hospitals with more than 3,100 beds, 19,000 employees, numerous clinics and outpatient facilities, 16 home care agencies and three joint-venture retirement centers. For more information, visit www.adventisthealth.org and www.howardhospital.com.

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