

Preparedness goal of Disaster Training Day on USD campus



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Medical response is one of the most important parts of dealing with disaster situations, and last week, more than 300 college students came to Vermillion to learn about dealing with such a crisis.

Friday, Jan. 31, was the day of the 11th annual Disaster Training Day, which was held in the Lee Medical Building on the USD campus.

"It gives a well-rounded overview of disaster life support functions and organization," said Bill Chalcraft, program administrator for the South Dakota Department of Health (DOH).

The day gave the approximately 320 health care students from USD and SDSU an opportunity to take a number of breakout sessions on such topics as anaphylaxis, immunization, triage and psychiatric first aid.

The students also could become certified in Core Disaster Life Support

(CDLS) from the National Disaster Life Support Foundation.

"It's very informative," said Jessica Wineland, a nurse practitioner student with SDSU. "It's awesome to know that those resources are there for us if something were to happen, and it's really awesome that South Dakota utilizes its students to respond to those disasters, so that there's enough hands on deck."

"It's amazing what they can put in one day, especially with all the inter-professional students that are here, to be able to make sure that the state and the community is prepared if a disaster occurs. They really cover all the bases," said first-year USD med student Collin Michels.

The sessions were led by USD faculty, DOH employees, physicians and first responders.

Bridget Nichols, an instructor with the USD School of Health Sciences, nursing, facilitated one of the immunization stations.

"It's going well," Nichols said at the midpoint of the day. "We're finding that the

students are collaborating nicely, and the ones that haven't done it before are learning from those who have."

Dr. Matt Owens of the Redfield Community Memorial Hospital was one of the lecturers for the CDLS course, which took four hours.

"Some of the major issues we talk to our students about are personal preparedness and personal safety," Owens said. "Things like triage, how to sort patients based on the severity of illness. We talk about the disaster system. Public health is a huge part of this, the kind of support systems they can plan on, and basically the interplay between local, county, state and federal response to disasters."

Along with CDLS certification, students were given a chance to register with the Statewide Emergency Registry of Volunteers in South Dakota, which coordinates the pre-registration of medical and healthcare professionals who are willing to volunteer during disaster situations.

Disaster Training Day has been held at USD since 2003.

"It's grown over the years," Chalcraft said. "It started small, with just the medical students, and we've expanded gradually to include other health professions."

Those include dental hygiene, masters in social



Two college students learn how to give an injection at an immunization station at the annual Disaster Training Day, which was held Jan. 31 in the Lee Medical Building on the USD campus.

(Photo by Travis Gulbrandson)

work, clinical lab science, nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, physician assistant, physician and clinical psychology.

"We tweak it a little bit every year with the breakout sessions," Chalcraft said. "We adjust (them) based on what's going on in the world, and what's important for the students to take home."

According to a press release, 1,037 students have participated, with 267 becoming certified in CDLS from the National Disaster

Life Support Foundation in the past three years alone.

Chalcraft said the event helps students understand the system that's in place to help coordinate efforts when a disaster strikes.

"It's a lot of working with other disciplines," he said. "They can't respond alone. It takes a team, it takes a community to really respond effectively. I think that's what they really get out of this the most, (the idea) that we're not in it alone, that there's an organized way to respond and handle these events."

Michels agreed, saying its most useful aspect is "just preparing the future health professionals of South Dakota, given the world that we live in. Who knows what could happen? It's great training that we can use in a scaled-down environment, too."

Owens said the day helps

students in a number of respects.

"One, it makes them realize they're a part of a greater health care community," he said. "Number two, they have an opportunity with training to play a support role for their hometown, whether that's West River, East River."

"Number three, it gives them basic information on what to do," Owens said. "It's not if a disaster happens. It's when, and what it's going to look like."

Last week's event was coordinated by the DOH, the USD Sanford School of Medicine, USD School of Health Sciences, SDSU, the Regional Training Center for Upper Midwest and the Yankton Rural Area Health Education Center (YRAHEC).

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