Evidence to Practice: Code Orange: Disaster Response at a Rural Community Hospital
Ina L. Glass, MSN, RN
Ephraim McDowell Fort Logan Critical Access Hospital
Paula Ledford, Kevin Goetz

Problem:
The ability to respond effectively to contamination from hazardous chemicals is essential. Teenage boys in rural Lincoln County, Kentucky, decided to experiment with a chemical mixture they found on an Internet site. It occurred on a school bus full of children going to school one October morning in 2010.

Evidence:
Evidence supports disaster preparation in rural areas. The Joint Commission has required disaster drills for many years. In their study, Jacobson, et. al., (2010) found the need for training in rural America notable. Fewer than 10% of nurses in the study were confident in their ability to act appropriately in a disastrous event.

Strategy:
In May 2010 a chemical disaster drill was developed that tested the existing Code Orange policies and procedures developed in July 2002. The scenario consisted of an automobile crashing into the high school. A methamphetamine lab in the trunk exploded on contact. During the drill 23 patients were given emergency treatment for a variety of injuries and exposures. The decontamination team was activated and actually “washed down” several people.

Practice Change:
Communication lapsed within the hospital and among the emergency responders. It caused patient treatment delays. After the drill additional meetings were held with emergency services and the decontamination team for better education, flow of information and improved decontamination procedures.

Evaluation:
The hospital staff, along with county EMS staff, fire and police departments and the area Hazmat Team made changes. Treatment time was shortened. Decontamination time improved.

Results:
Needed procedural changes were made. Communication improved. The actual Code Orange that occurred in October 2010 demonstrated the successful outcome of the changes made.

Recommendations:
Continue planning, training and drills, the keys to staff preparedness and confidence. These provide a framework for decision-making and action. Use evidence-based practice.

Lessons Learned:
Disaster planning, training, and exercises prepared our rural hospital staff for a successful real life Code Orange. Evidence-based practice produces positive outcomes.
Bibliography:


