

MAG MRC participates in high-profile training exercise

By Ian McCullough, M.D., member, Medical Association of Georgia Medical Reserve Corps

More than 20 members of the Medical Association of Georgia's Medical Reserve Corps (MAG MRC) participated in 'Vigilant Guard' – a response training exercise that was designed to "simulate a realistic natural disaster to improve cooperation in preparing for emergencies and catastrophic events" that took place at multiple sites in 31 counties in the state on March 23-31.

The training that occurred in Georgia was part of a larger event that was sponsored by the U.S. Northern Command that involved 9,000 personnel in seven states. It was the first time the Vigilant Guard event took place in Georgia.

The training – which "simulated local and state emergency response to a category 3 or 4 hurricane making landfall on the Georgia coast" – was co-hosted by the Georgia Emergency Management Agency, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Georgia Department of Defense.

"This exercise gave us a realistic opportunity to train for a rapid deployment and response to emergencies and catastrophic events," said MAG MRC Medical Director **John S. Harvey, M.D.** "There is no doubt that it enhanced our readiness and capabilities in significant ways."

Dr. Harvey added that, "Of course, getting an opportunity to fly in a C-130 Hercules plane and Blackhawk helicopters was also a great life experience – so our sincere thanks to the National Guard 165th Air Wing for that."

The Georgia Department of Defense stressed that, "This is one of the largest disaster relief training exercises in the state... [it is] part of an ongoing effort to maintain a constant state of readiness and interagency efficiency."

Vigilant Guard is meant to "test and enhance the relationships between civilian, federal and military partners."

Dr. Harvey pointed out that, "We all remember the effects of Hurricane Matthew in 2016, so we took a lot of lessons learned from that event and refined the processes we employed during this exercise."

The Georgia State Defense Force and members of an "advance" MAG MRC team constructed and manned a mobile surge hospital at the Air Dominance Center in Savannah as part of the training exercise.

"Forty 'victims' were transported from Tybee Island via UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters to a triage area, where they received care by the medical teams," Dr. Harvey explained. "We then formulated a plan to transport these patients to a tertiary receiving hospital."

The Georgia training scenarios included disease outbreaks, cyber-attacks, chemical spills, search and rescue, collapsed structures, and medical mass casualties.

In addition to physicians, a number of professions were represented – including scientists, critical care and trauma nurses, registered respiratory therapists, medical students, and educators.

Importantly, there were no injuries reported during the training.

In his post-exercise evaluation, Dr. Harvey said, "Kudos to the entire Georgia team, including our MAG MRC members, the Georgia National Guard, the Georgia State Defense

Force, the Georgia Department of Health, the many first responders, the Medical College of Georgia faculty and residents, and the other volunteers and professionals who demonstrated great dedication and professionalism and who made this exercise a success."

With the approval of the U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services, MAG formed the nation's first medical society-sponsored statewide volunteer MRC in 2014.

The MAG MRC supplements the official medical and public health and emergency services resources that are available in the state. It trains its members to respond to declared emergencies, including natural disasters (e.g., wildfires, hurricanes, tornados, blizzards, floods) and disease outbreaks.

MAG's MRC is comprised of 50 deployable members with 30 additional personnel in the training pipeline.

Health care providers who are interested in serving in the MAG MRC should contact Susan Moore at smoore@mag.org or 678.303.9275.

Go to www.mag.org/affiliates/mrc for additional information on the MAG MRC.

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