

VA Putting Mobile Pharmacies on the Road

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WASHINGTON — To support veterans and their families during major emergencies, especially natural disasters, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has begun to deploy mobile pharmacies that will provide vital medicine when patients are unable to fill their prescriptions. VA will also open up the facilities to help communities during major disasters and other emergencies.

“The mobile pharmacies give VA the ability to provide critical medications to veterans when disaster strikes,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. “VA is committed to ensuring our veterans receive their care and prescriptions as soon as possible during an emergency.”

Each VA mobile pharmacy is housed in a 40-foot-long solid steel trailer built to withstand winds in a Category 3 storm. The units include a satellite connection with VA’s Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacy system, a computerized, automated state-of-the-art mailout pharmacy that can process more than 1,000 prescriptions hourly.

Pharmacists can use the satellite system to obtain a veteran’s prescription data to dispense the drugs on site. In addition, VA can send replacement medications during an emergency by mail or another carrier to a veteran’s home or temporary address.

VA recognized the need for mobile pharmacies in 2005 after hurricanes Katrina and Rita severely damaged VA medical centers along the Gulf Coast. The Department deployed several mobile medical clinics as part of its response to the disasters.

The first mobile pharmacy was unveiled on Sept. 11, 2007 in front of VA’s Washington, D.C., headquarters. The unit was displayed recently at a meeting of the American Society of Health System Pharmacists in Las Vegas. A second mobile pharmacy is expected to be delivered in March 2008.

To ensure rapid response to a wide range of emergencies, VA’s mobile pharmacies will be strategically placed across the nation. Plans now call for one of the three mobile pharmacies to be stationed at Dallas; Murfreesboro, Tenn.; and Charleston, S.C. The Department also

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expects to acquire a fourth unit that will be placed in the western part of the country.

Each mobile pharmacy is divided into five compartments, including a work area for pharmacists, an entryway accessible to patients and a sleeping area with a bath and shower for VA personnel.

Pharmacy personnel from across the country have already volunteered to staff the units in the event of a natural disaster or other emergency. Six pharmacists who were part of a regional disaster drill have already completed their training and can deploy on short notice.

“Our mobile clinics enabled us to provide critical services during hurricanes Katrina and Rita not only to veterans but also to thousands of others in the area who were adversely affected by the storm,” said Michael Valentino, VA’s pharmacy chief. “These new mobile pharmacy units will ensure that we are even better prepared for future emergencies.”