Many Practices Are Not Prepared for Disasters

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SAN DIEGO — About a third of medical practices have no emergency medical preparedness plan to deal with disasters such as hurricanes and terrorist attacks, results from a national survey showed. More than 60% have not had disaster drills in their practice in the last 12 months and report not knowing how to coordinate actions with federal emergency agencies, Christopher D. Stokes and his colleagues said in a poster session at the annual conference of the Medical Group Management Association. The Health and Human Services department has made $1.1 billion available for some entities to shore up their emergency plans, but “very little money is directed toward medical practices.”

The researchers surveyed 188 U.S. medical practices to assess their level of emergency preparedness and attitudes about disaster planning and emergency preparedness. The respondents participated through MGMA’s Legislative and Executive Advocacy Response Network, which conducts research on medical practice policy issues, said Mr. Stokes, program manager at MGMA’s Center for Research. Most of the respondents (87%) indicated there was a moderate to high probability of disaster occurring in their community within the next 5 years. Nearly a third (30%) reported having no emergency preparedness plan; 68% do not know how to coordinate actions with federal emergency agencies; and in the last 12 months, 71% have not participated in drills with a local hospital, and 84% have not participated in drills with governmental agencies.

“Including [medical] practices in funded preparation activities will strengthen national preparation, improve recovery efforts, and leverage scarce resources,” the researchers said. The study was funded by the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response through the Idaho State University Institute of Rural Health Idaho Bioterrorism Awareness and Preparedness Program.