3.11 Communication with the Media and the Public About an Emerging Infectious Disease (EID)

Purpose

To provide appropriate, accurate and uniform information to the media and the public on all aspects of an EID.

Audience

To the administrations and public relations personnel at the Galveston County Health District (GCHD), and The University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB).

Policy Statement:

I. Goals
   A. To develop a system of communication compatible with that of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS).
   B. To develop an integrated program between UTMB and the GCHD for preparation and release of information to the media and the public.
   C. Specific goals for the integrated public relations program.
      1. To instill and maintain public confidence in the nation's public health system and its ability to respond to and manage an EID outbreak.
      2. To contribute to the maintenance of order, minimization of public panic and fear, and facilitation of public protection through the provision of accurate, rapid, and complete information.
      3. To provide accurate, consistent, and comprehensive information about an EID.
      4. To address rumors, inaccuracies, and misconceptions as quickly as possible, and prevent stigmatization of affected groups.

II. The foundation for effective communication is a set of key messages that can be used consistently to highlight and reinforce the lessons learned and generate an appropriate response to an EID that minimizes risk while ensuring a strong and rapid response.

III. All information about EID cases at UTMB provided to the print and electronic media, either by press release or interview of UTMB personnel, will be coordinated between the Public Relations Officer at the GCHD and the Office of University Advancement (OUA) at UTMB. All information to be released by the GCHD about cases of an EID hospitalized at UTMB will be coordinated with the OUA at

UTMB.

IV. Guidelines for providing information to the media.

A. GCHD public health spokespersons should answer questions concerning an EID and the actions being taken to control and respond to the outbreak.

B. Personnel dealing with the media should be trained on the type of questions they should answer and those that should be directed elsewhere.

C. Personnel should also be trained in strategies for emphasizing key messages in all responses.

D. Adhering to key messages will allow communication to be consistent over time.

E. Key messages must be science-based, reflect current knowledge, and be based on good public health practice.

V. Formats for release of information to the media

A. Daily or twice-daily press briefings.

B. Press briefings may be delivered by one spokesperson or by a panel led by a moderator.

C. Media interviews with experts at the GCHD or at UTMB.