Are community health centers prepared for bioterrorism?

Community health centers (CHCs) are essential in the delivery of primary care services to underserved populations. Given the critical function of CHCs, surprisingly little is known about their role in preparing for or responding to acts of terrorism. This survey-based study examines the state of CHCs in terrorism preparedness and assesses their training needs. Of the administrators who responded to the survey, 87% indicated that their centers had an emergency response or disaster plan. Of those, 78% indicated they had updated their plans within the past year. Among those who had a written plan, 41% addressed bioterrorism preparedness, 38% had contingencies for a mass influx of patients, and 3% indicated that their plans addressed increasing operational capacity. Additionally, while 48% reported having assessed the education and training needs of their professional staff in the area of disease surveillance and reporting, only 24% had assessed these needs in relation to bioterrorism. Our findings suggest that CHCs have made great strides in preparing for some emergencies but that preparedness does not yet extend to specifically include terrorism events. Policy and practice recommendations are included to more fully develop CHCs as a resource.