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## Featured Article

### Developing Emergency Management Capacity Through Virtual Operations Support Team - Uncas Health District

With the rising role of social media in our culture especially as it relates to disasters, the Uncas Health District (UHD), based out of Norwich, Connecticut recognized the need for support in this area. Across the globe, Virtual Operation Support Teams (VOSTs) work virtually to monitor and analyze social media for important trends before, during, or after an event.

In 2014, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health used a VOST in managing the Papal Visit to the city. They recruited from the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) and trained for this special event. After learning of the VOST's success in Philadelphia, UHD applied for and won an MRC Challenge Award in 2016 to develop a similar capacity within its MRC unit. The project goals were to 1) provide broader and deeper public health situational awareness information via social media analysis, 2) engage community members for the purpose of helping people help themselves during an emergency to reduce the demand on emergency responders, 3) strengthen Connecticut MRC units through recruitment activities in the Preparedness phase, and 4) promote community resilience through public health and emergency preparedness messaging in all phases of emergency management.

This innovative concept addresses local emergency management's capacity to integrate social media into situational awareness, response, and recovery operations. Many local Emergency Management Departments have limited capacity or capability to mine social media. Using a Medical Reserve Corps volunteer team to act as a force multiplier to emergency responders for the express purpose of monitoring social media is a unique approach. Because the VOST can deploy virtually, the entire state of Connecticut can be supported by this team. To date, the VOST has supported communities representing 36% of CT's population.

The Uncas MRC recognized several advantages of developing a VOST. Because the volunteer team members deploy virtually, it eliminates the need to provide physical space and resources for these volunteers. Virtual deployment affords volunteers the ability to serve from anywhere provided they have Internet access and a device. Benefits of using a VOST include: 1) no geographic barriers, 2) volunteers do not have to put themselves in harm's way to respond, 3) activation time is significantly reduced, 4) there are several free online tools to facilitate team operations, 5) this type of volunteering capitalizes on a technology (social media) that younger citizens are adept at, and 6) a VOST provides more training and response opportunities for non-medical volunteers.

Through this initiative, the Uncas MRC partnered with Epicenter Media & Training to conduct the VOST training. A total of 24 VOST volunteers were recruited and trained, with 11 new MRC volunteers, and 88% of the original team members remain active in the unit. Each training session was evaluated by participants using Epicenter's online training evaluation form. Results from these evaluations informed refinement of future sessions. They were able to successfully fulfill 10 of 11 team activation requests from July 2016 to November 2017. Team members donated 483 hours of

services at an estimated value of \$17,000. The CT VOST Manager surveyed requesting agencies about their experience with the VOST, and of the four who responded, satisfaction levels were quite high. All four indicated they would use the VOST again, and in fact two of the four have. Because of agency feedback the VOST has developed a report template for sharing key findings with Incident Command and the addition of a proprietary analysis tool to enhance access to Facebook and Instagram.

The UHD's ability to sustain CT VOST will depend on several key factors. Future funding, availability of training and resource tools, continued support from state level agencies, and continued requests for the VOST are needed. The CT VOST has a strong network of emergency management advocates across the state at local and regional levels who want to ensure the continued success and availability of this unique resource. As the UHD looks to the future of the VOST it plans to focus on educating local EMDs about the VOST capabilities and exploring other ways to use CT VOST and its proprietary tools for passive public health surveillance on a continuous basis.

## MRC/NACCHO Connection

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### MRC Network Profile Infographics Available

NACCHO developed three standalone infographics that highlight information from the 2017 MRC Network Profile. These standalone infographics provide a visual presentation of the MRC that can be used to promote the capabilities of the MRC and further inform community stakeholders.

- [A Timeline of the MRC](#)
- [MRC Unit Snapshot](#)
- [MRC Unit Capabilities](#)

The infographics and the Network Profile are available for download on the [NACCHO website](#). In addition, there are mini-infographics available that are perfect for sharing on social media sties, unit newsletters, or unit websites.

## Announcements

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### Report released on Healthcare Disaster Resilience by the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security

The Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security recently released [A Framework for Healthcare Disaster Resilience: A View to the Future](#), which examined US disaster healthcare with the purpose of identifying changes, innovations, and new efforts that could strengthen the country's ability to provide medical care in major disasters.

### ASPR TRACIE Exchange Newsletter - Keeping Communities Safe and Healthy in Times of Crisis

ASPR TRACIE Exchange Newsletter - [Keeping Communities Safe and Healthy in Times of Crisis](#)

This issue of The Exchange, highlights the stories of healthcare coalitions, emergency managers, and local practitioners involved in healthcare facility evacuation due to two types of disasters: wildfires and hurricane-related flooding.

Included are lessons learned by the private sector and federal staff who helped oversee the evacuation, movement, and care of dialysis patients in the hope that these lessons can help emergency planners identify gaps in their own evacuation plans.

### Highlighted Resource: Partnership Tools

[Find a Partnership](#), a new tool from the Practical Playbook, is an online database of multi-sector partnerships dedicated to improving community health. Through an environmental scan of multisector, health-focused projects that have been active from 2012 on, the Practical Playbook discovered over 500 potential partners for collaboration. By displaying a curated list of population health projects by location and topic, this tool helps communities, funders, and national partners connect with each other.

NACCHO also has resources available on Pharmacy Partnerships in the NACCHO Toolbox. To access the Pharmacy Partnerships Toolkit, [follow this link](#) to the NACCHO Toolbox then use the Toolkits dropdown box located below the search bar to select the “Pharmacy Partnerships Toolkit”.

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The mission of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) is to be a leader, partner, catalyst, and voice with local health departments.

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