Bioterrorism and Nursing:
What every nurse should know
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Before September 11, 2001 the use of disease causing agents as a weapon was not a primary concern for nurses and other healthcare workers. Since then acts of bioterrorism, such as the use of Anthrax, have instilled fear into the American people. These acts have also given healthcare workers the realization that they are vital during attacks of bioterrorism.

In order for nurses and other healthcare workers to be prepared for a bioterrorism attack they need to be properly educated in their roles during these times. Education should begin in the classroom and continue throughout their career as a nurse. Seminars, tutorials, and other educational opportunities should be available. This is to ensure all information is up to date and all healthcare workers are familiar with various protocol. Public health facilities should have a plan of action for bioterrorism attacks and it should be practiced regularly. Each healthcare worker must know where they fit into this plan and how to carry out their role effectively, keeping in mind that flexibility is an important key in an emergency situation.

Healthcare workers, especially nurses, are the main line of communication with a patient. This close contact allows nurses to keep careful track of any signs and symptoms the patient may be suffering. Nurses need to be able to quickly recognize specific symptoms in association with common agents used in bioterrorism. These symptoms should be reported directly to the physician, who, in turn, needs to contact healthcare officials. An open line of communication between healthcare officials, local, state, and federal government’s is dire.

Not only do nurses need to be able to recognize signs and symptoms, it is also essential that they are aware of how to properly treat and vaccinate for diseases. During a bioterrorism attack the public will be in a state of panic. Nurses can curb this panic by being knowledgeable about the drugs they are working with. This will ensure proper education of the public, will help quell fears instilled in people, and will allow vaccination and treatment to go quickly and efficiently. Along those same lines, public health facilities need to be properly equipped with, or have access to, a sufficient amount of antibiotics and vaccinations. Performing proper aseptic technique when giving injections will prevent cross-contamination and the spread of disease. Nurses also need to take care in proper disposal of these items.

Healthcare workers, especially nurses, can play a leading role in helping prevent and treat acts of bioterrorism. However, it requires education and planning, as well as open communication with all parties involved. Nurses need to know signs and symptoms of diseases and how to properly vaccinate and treat. As the threat of bioterrorism increases healthcare professionals need to ready at any sign of an attack.