

Family and Personal Disaster Planning

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Few of us, myself included, took seriously the advice that everyone should have a thorough personal or family disaster plan. In other words, something other than merely agreeing on where to go and what to do if the house caught on fire. I was afraid of scaring my children for something that was unlikely to happen when they were younger, and I didn't think about it as they got older.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, it is obvious that we should not be so complacent. Broadcast images of wide-scale evacuations, relocations, home devastation and shocking loss of life have all helped to drive home the point that disaster can strike at any time, and that bad things do happen to good people. Many people have been involved in the lives of survivors and refugees through community and church related organizations to help these families relocate and rebuild their lives.

One of the services that HoG offers is nurse and social worker home visits to develop a Bleeding Action Plan, which will be spelled out and turned into laminated wallet cards for family members and child caretakers to carry with them. Hurricane Katrina victims did not have the luxury or time to stop to get basic supplies for their daily needs.

Keeping prescriptions up to date and never getting down to your last dose of factor or other prescription medications are wise any time, but especially if you need to travel unexpectedly. When hearing of the gas shortage associated with Hurricane Katrina and the evacuation, I was reminded of my mother telling me as a young teenager that a woman traveling alone or with children should never allow her car to get below a half tank of gas, to help decrease her chance of becoming a victim.

Most nurses and health care workers carry a small first aid kit in their car, but all families should also have one available when they travel. How many times have those of you with children been at Grandmother's house when your child developed a fever, vomiting, or you woke up with a cough, sore throat and headache? Some HoG clients tell me they always carry bandaids and 2x2 gauze in their wallets. If you travel out of town, you need to carry factor and supplies for infusions with you, or have a cold pack available for Stimate®. Without these supplies, it may mean a trip to the local drugstore, or hours spent waiting in an emergency room trying to explain your bleeding disorder. If you have a few basic supplies, you are prepared and waste no time getting proper treatment.

After the death of a family member and the sudden traumatic illness of my mother when a medical Power of Attorney became necessary, I learned first hand the importance of having all of my personal important papers in one easily accessible place for any emergency. My siblings and I spent many hours searching for deeds, insurance papers, copies of a will, etc. We had previously put together an information sheet, which we all shared, listing our mother's medications and what they are used for, her doctor's name and number, local emergency room numbers, names and numbers of important family members in the event of an emergency. What struck me was that I had not done the same careful preparation for my own family. I now

have a locking box that I can grab and go, and have advised all of my family members of the location of this important box and its contents.

The American Red Cross has an excellent document on developing a Family Disaster Supplies Kit at www.redcross.org. Some of the most important documentation to have readily available includes:

- Insurance policies
- Wills
- Contract deeds to home, auto, or other personal property
- Bank account numbers
- Credit card account numbers and companies
- An inventory of valuable household goods (a videotaped walk through your house while you describe the contents is an easy way to record).
- Family records such as marriage, birth, divorce, death certificates and immunization records
- Lists of important telephone numbers. Even if important numbers are stored in your cell phone, if it doesn't work for any reason, you will need numbers to call from another phone.

Keep these items in airtight plastic bags or a fireproof container. Copies of important papers can be kept in bank storage boxes. You may also want to consider personal cell phones with a crank-type charging device as part of any disaster preparedness kit.

My niece in Mississippi was unable to contact her family for four days after Katrina, due to a dead cell phone battery, no power to recharge it, and land lines that were tied up or not working at all. She was finally able to travel far enough to reach a Starbucks coffee shop with e-mail to let family members know she was safe.

If you are not currently prepared for an emergency, please take the time to create this very important disaster plan for yourself and your family. If HoG can help you prepare a Bleeding Action Plan, please call to request a home visit from your nurse and social worker. While an emergency plan cannot prepare you for everything, it can help save a lot of time and stress later on when time is critical.