

Linking Medical Reserve Corps Units and University Health Systems

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The University of Virginia Medical Reserve Corps (UVAMRC) is a community service and outreach project involving UVa Health System faculty and students, and community partners. It is the first Medical Reserve Corps unit with a student leadership model and one of a growing number of university-based programs across the country. The UVAMRC works with many local, state, and national groups to supplement the local and regional medical response during a major disaster or bioterrorism event. The UVAMRC also initiates and develops ongoing community health projects, such as disaster preparedness education presentations, that serve our local area. While striving to meet these ends, the UVAMRC provides a unique opportunity for its members to integrate service, emergency and medical experience, and interpersonal, organizational and leadership skills in a manner that most professional school curricula are traditionally unable to accomplish.

On a nationwide level, the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) is the component of the Citizen Corps that organizes local volunteers to assist regular medical response professionals and facilities during a large-scale local emergency, such as an influenza epidemic or a hazardous materials spill. Health professionals (current, retired, or otherwise employed) and others with relevant skills (such as students in the health professions) volunteer their time and skills within a planned, organized, and coordinated local MRC, united during times of emergency. In Charlottesville/Albemarle County, due to the UVAMRC's relationship with the UVa Health System, these health professionals and students are often affiliated with UVa.

From its inception in the Fall of 2003, the UVA Medical Reserve Corps has striven to benefit the community in unique ways. Foremost, its purpose is to supplement the existing emergency response structure with trained and certified health professionals and students from every field, as well as members from the community at large. As a result of its integration with the local emergency planning and response organizations—the Thomas Jefferson Area Health Department, the American Red Cross, and the Emergency Services of the City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County—and with the UVA Health System, a main success of the program thus far has been affording a means of collaboration among response organizations that had not previously existed. This link between the UVa Health System and other public health agencies through the UVAMRC has provided an avenue for health professionals to become involved as volunteers in disaster preparedness efforts in the Charlottesville/Albemarle County area.

By providing these unique services and opportunities and by partnering with the UVa Health System's large pool of health professionals and students, the UVAMRC has ensured a steady increase in member recruitment and retention over the past three years and now has over 250 members including an active student leadership group.