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An innovative community support program following the terror attacks of 9/11

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Before launching a program for children and families affected by the terror attacks of 9/11/01, the Children's Health Fund (CHF), a national organization committed to medically underserved children and families, commissioned a Marist poll to assess the impact on children, and another poll after anthrax reports began. Questions focusing on child behavior changes and parents' need for support were asked of 466 randomly selected NYC parents of children age 4-18 years. Fifty-two percent of children were concerned about safety, with an increase after initial anthrax reports. Anxiety and poor concentration were reported for 39% of children; 29% showed signs of depression; and 15% somatic symptoms. Half of parents value community services. There was minimal variation based on income, age, or proximity to Trade Centers. These results are consistent with the recent national RAND survey of adult response to 9/11 (NEJM, 345:20). CHF implemented a mobile Community Support Unit providing information, counseling, case management and referrals. Preliminary analysis of the concerns of the first 193 persons served shows widespread anxiety and stress, but rarely the request for ongoing psychotherapy. Initial concerns are based on primary needs, such as information, anticipatory guidance and support to help them respond to their children while managing their own anxiety. Many also require help to access to benefits to which they are entitled. Mental health needs, if present, are revealed over time. We conclude that an ongoing community-based model focusing on information, support and short-term intervention, rather than the FEMA immediate brief intervention model, is needed.

Preparedness for and Repercussions of Bio-Terrorism

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