



H1N1 Session:

How Fulton County, GA Responded to H1N1

1:00-1:50pm, Baker Room

Speaker:

Valencia Sylvain Stinson, Training Officer and the Office of Emergency Preparedness, Fulton County, Georgia

Author:

Dr. Tom Keating, founder of Citizens, Learners, and Educators Against Neglect, covered the conference with Mr. Bob Wells, President of Wells Communication, Inc., of Atlanta. Project CLEAN is a national effort to improve public school restrooms that are too often filthy, inadequate, and chronically hazardous to student health.

Importance of Training – A Case Study of Fulton County, Georgia

By Tom Keating

How Fulton County, Georgia, Responded to H1N1 was a case-study of anecdotes and experiences how Valencia Sylvain Stinson, Training Officer and the Office of Emergency Preparedness and the county department assisted children and adults in the diverse metropolitan Atlanta area during the spring of 2009.

Before and especially during the late March and early April 2009 outbreak, the Fulton County staff used the acronym **BURP** – get daily **B**riefings and **U**dates; build **R**elationships and **P**artnerships. CDC and WHO fact sheets were gathered, monitored, and shared. A sheet with a dozen frequently asked questions and warning signs for the influenza was distributed to county constituents that highlighted the following: a definition of swine flu, its signs and symptoms, a description of the current severity of the infection, contact information, treatments, and practical advice as well as contact information.

Fulton County staff had also worked with many community organizations, religious places of worship, and schools so that when outreach was necessary they had practiced an old adage: “Make your friends before you need them” and they had mostly avoided the pitfalls of the Chinese proverb: “Too late to dig well, when house on fire.”

The County Health Department had stressed to residents that much of the information was time sensitive, so it always included contact information like www.cdc.gov or 1.800.CDC, INFO (1.800.232.2636) or Valencia Sylvain Stinson, 404.730.1287, vsstinson@dhr.state.ga.us.

The Office of Emergency Preparedness and other County offices had offered community residents a video, fact sheet, preparedness updates, and referral sheets, most of which were available on web translations in nine languages. Health Department officials report on its web page that over 400 people have been trained to educate the public about Swine Flu. The Atlanta-Fulton County Emergency Management Agency was also involved in periodic coordination team meetings to discuss plans for Swine Flu outreach in cities within Fulton County.

‘Ms. V’ as her clients called her, energetically outlined several training principles with stories about how children and adults appreciated the county’s straight forward, simple message: “Prevention not Panic.”

One telling anecdote took place at a church. She was seated at a head table during a breakfast gathering and she began to cough, and as she repeatedly cleared her throat, a few congregants moved away. The point of “social distancing,” for approximately six feet was felt

by interested church goers, and as a trainer she had shown the point of avoiding social contact with sick individuals.

Ms. V shared, that like with any major health occurrence, all things had not gone well each day. The eighteen AEC attendees appreciated the brief examples which might have taken place at any other public agency, such as printing difficulties, incident command structure issues, and the continuous need to dispel myths citizens formed from their perceptions of what organizations had presented publicly.

The Fulton County Manager made several public statements to county residents reassuring them their health was well protected. And the Fulton County Department of Health and Wellness increased its surveillance and communication with the Georgia Division of Public Health and CDC.

Nevertheless residents continuously raised questions. An especially telling anecdote was the story of one presentation to a few hundred people, many of whom were homeless. As one down-in-the outs man listened to the entire slide presentation, he zeroed in abruptly and not in a quiet manner as he asked the county representatives, "If you can't cure it and I don't have pigs, then why the h--- am I here?"

Neither public health professional, NEHA Conference registrant, nor any county citizen could have helped, but he was amused, yet put on notice by that unscripted FAQ. Ms.V., exemplifying all good flu trainers especially during the first spring wave of this particular influenza, had responded as best she could, established reliability and credibility with that man and the audience, and continued to provide updated information.

The Fulton County human hot line (404-730-6522 or in Spanish 404-730-5363), the coaching of additional trainers, and the continuous effort to allay fears with pertinent information to neighborhood planning units, all of which seemed to have organizational personas, were approached by a professional commitment to providing the most straight forward information and follow-up whenever possible. In that sense Fulton County and Ms. V were not a case study of one, but an example of how critical health workers successfully strive to talk the talk and walk the walk.