

April 8, 2004

## MEDICAL EMERGENCY RADIOLOGICAL RESPONSE TEAM (MERRT)

**1. PURPOSE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive establishes policy for the organization, training, certification, budget, equipment and deployment of the VHA Medical Emergency Radiological Response Team (MERRT).

### 2. BACKGROUND

a. The Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has approved the establishment of the VHA Medical Emergency Radiological Response Team (MERRT) for medical support to be provided under Executive Order (EO) 12657. Under this EO, available VA and Department of Defense medical resources would be used in response to a nuclear power plant accident. To meet the requirements of the Executive Order, a Concept of Operations (CONOPS) was developed. This CONOPS includes the development of a specialized team of VHA health professionals that, if such an accident occurred, could be rapidly deployed to an off-site medical provider to render both direct patient treatment and technical advice. By extension, this team would also support the National Response Plan (NRP), and other applicable radiological response plans integrated or linked to NRP, extending the role of the team to respond to any type of radiological event or disaster, including a terrorist incident. The team is titled the "Medical Emergency Radiological Response Team" or MERRT.

b. Upon request by the applicable authority, MERRT will be deployed in response to an accidental or deliberate release of radiation that requires a medical response. MERRT does not deploy as a "first responder" but does so as part of the Federal Radiological Emergency Response Plan (FRERP), NRP, or other authorized Federal response to assist the local medical community and healthcare providers in addressing any and all medical issues that arise from the discovery of radiation beyond normal background levels and the affect of that radiation on the exposed population. This includes assistance and support of local health care providers on the handling and treatment of exposed and contaminated casualties and internal support to VA entities, even in the absence of a national emergency.

**3. POLICY:** It is VHA policy to organize, train, equip, and deploy a MERRT to meet the requirements of EO 12657, as well as support FRERP and NRP.

### 4. ACTION

a. **The Under Secretary for Health.** The Under Secretary for Health is responsible for ensuring resource availability that will provide for organizing, training, equipping and deploying a MERRT.

b. **The Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management.** The Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management coordinates and works

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with the Chief Consultant, Emergency Management Strategic Healthcare Group, to ensure effective implementation of this Directive. This includes the appointment of a MERRT chief and ensuring the availability of MERRT members for training, exercise, and deployment, when required.

c. **Chief Consultant, Emergency Management Strategic Healthcare Group (EMSHG).**

The Chief Consultant, Emergency Management Strategic Healthcare Group, is responsible for:

- (1) MERRT recruitment and overall team development.
- (2) MERRT budget development and management.
- (3) Coordinating the training and education of MERRT members to ensure their preparedness to respond when required.
- (4) Providing the equipment and supplies for MERRT training and actual deployment.
- (5) Developing a MERRT Operations Plan (OPLAN) to be published as an annex to VHA Handbook 0320.
- (6) Developing and executing MERRT exercises.
- (7) Coordinating the reimbursement to VA of MERRT costs whenever a MERRT is activated and/or deployed in support of the FRERP, NRP, or other Federal authority.
- (8) Developing guidance for MERRT, i.e., guidebooks, handbooks, policies, standard operating procedures, planning guides, etc.
- (9) Designating an EMSHG staff member to serve as liaison with the MERRT Leader in coordinating EMSHG support.

d. **MERRT Leader.** The MERRT Leader is responsible for:

- (1) Overall supervision and management of the team when in deployed status to include both exercise and for an actual event.
- (2) Coordinating with the Chief Consultant, EMSHG, in identifying appropriate training requirements and venues, equipment needs, exercise, budget development and deployment and employment processes and procedures.
- (3) Assessing the impact on human health, when deployed for an actual event, and for providing appropriate consultation and technical advice to local, state, and Federal authorities.
- (4) Providing medical advice on the handling and treatment of individuals exposed to or contaminated by radioactive materials.

(5) Managing radiation trauma and coordination of crisis counseling, related to radiation injuries and exposure.

(6) Coordinating the use of other deployed VA medical resources, as appropriate, and as might be directed by VHA Central Office.

**5. REFERENCES**

- a. VA Directive 0320, dated October 16, 1999
- b. VHA Directive 0320, dated May 1, 1997.
- c. Executive Order 12657, dated November 18, 1988.
- d. Federal Response Plan (Interim), dated January 2003.
- e. Federal Radiological Emergency Response Plan (FRERP), dated February 1, 1996.
- f. Initial National Response Plan, dated September 30, 2003.

**6. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY:** EMSHG (13C) is responsible for the content of this Directive. Questions may be addressed to 304-264-4835.

**7. RESCISSIONS:** None. This VHA Directive expires April 30, 2009.

S/ Art Hamerschlag for  
Jonathan B. Perlin, MD, PhD, MSHA, FACP  
Acting Under Secretary for Health

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