

Emergency response is focus of joint training



PHOTOS BY MOLLY MATHIS/THE DAILY REFLECTOR

Student doctors and nurses practice responding to a mass casualty during a drill at the Brody School of Medicine at ECU on Saturday.

Students participate in mass casualty exercise

BY GINGER LIVINGSTON
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Doctors and nurses spend their careers together but while in school they rarely train together.

That changed on Saturday at East Carolina University.

Forty-five students from ECU's Accelerated BSN Program and the Brody School of Medicine for the first time jointly participated in a mass casualty exercise.

The students worked together to triage the patients and then practiced treating and stabilizing them.

"We wanted to not only



Student doctors and nurses practice responding to a mass casualty event.

teach everyone how to respond in a disaster but to build that foundation of teamwork," said Kristen Cossaart, a nursing stu-

dent who helped coordinate the event.

The day's training centered around a scenario where a boiler exploded

at a school that was housing hurricane evacuees.

Initially, the student coordinators planned a scenario where participants would respond to a mass shooting incident. But Hurricane Florence's affect on eastern North Carolina changed the plan.

"When Florence hit our community was extremely impacted," Cossaart said, who at the time was working with as a school nurse at Vanceboro-Farm Life Elementary School as part of her community health rotation.

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"A lot of my colleagues who were also school nurses, we had to become disaster relief and work with the Red Cross," she said. "A lot of people who worked at health departments were having to go out and become more like home health nurses.

"On our side it became very real to us and we realized how it could actually happen," she said.

Cossaart was not at the school during or immediately after the hurricane but she did accompany nurses to the homes of patients and saw how flooding had damaged their homes and vehicles, leaving them unable to get food or medicine.

"A lot of our patients also evacuated, so we were trying to figure out where are our patients and were they getting the resources they need," she said. "It was eye-opening as a student."

Having both groups train together helps them to become familiar with each other's roles, "because they are going to spend a lifetime working together," said Susan Kidd, director of the College of Nursing's Accelerated BSN Program, which is designed to help students who have obtained a bachelor's degree but want obtain a bachelor's of science nursing degree.

"As medical students we get so caught up in medical school it's kind of hard to realize you are part of a system," said Andrew Piner, a second-year medical student and president of the Emergency Medicine Interest Group. He was another of the student coordinators.

"That is what today is, learning to working as a team and kind of figure out how the roles are going to work, where the leadership goes and how to work together for the betterment of the patients," Piner said.

Working with the students were 15 standardized patients, individuals who act as patients so medical students can refine their communication and diagnostic skills.

Kathie Harvey has been a stan-



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dardized patient for five years. Saturday was her first mass casualty drill. She posed as a woman with a bruised leg that she couldn't stand on, demanding she be immediately transported to the hospital — even though a "patient" with a metal rod through his head was less than five feet from her.

"They learn how to deal with all kinds of people. It's excellent for them," Harvey said.

In another scenario a patient hospitalized for an injury goes into cardiac arrest and multiple nurses and doctors respond. The scenario requires one team member to assume leadership and direct the actions of the others.

One of the nursing students, who in real life has EMT training, started the assessment and directed two doctors to begin chest compressions while the other doctors and nurses

provided oxygen and prepared a defibrillator.

When the scenario ended Dr. Walter "Skip" Robey III with the Inter-professional Clinical Simulation Program quizzed the group on their actions. Robey pointed out to the med students that in a team setting it is not unusual for a nurse, especially an experienced nurse, to take charge in a hospital setting.

"When we are in school, a lot of times we are learning from a book, in a static situation," Piner said. "There is no pressure. You read a question, you read a scenario and there's a direct answer."

Saturday's hands-on experience showed students how to apply their critical thinking skills in situations that required acting in the moment, he said.

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