

December 30, 2005

Dear Director of the State Dept. of Health,

The Network of New England is an organization, contracted by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid (CMS), to provide quality oversight for End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) out patient dialysis clinics and transplant centers throughout the six New England states. Part of our quality oversight function includes advocacy for renal patients and ensuring access to dialysis care. Influenza immunization for all patients and health caregivers has always been a communication priority for our agency as a way to ensure the high risk ESRD population is adequately provided for. We believe the impact of ESRD patient needs will overwhelm the healthcare system during a pandemic. There are over ten thousand patients receiving dialysis in New England, and the need for dialysis will not rest during an epidemic. It seems the best first line of defense would be to provide dialysis direct care staff with first available immunization and antiviral medication.

Your Public Health Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Plan, the CDC plan and the World Health Organization (WHO), all include ESRD patients in the high-risk population due to their chronic illness and immunosuppressant status. The high-risk categorization would enable dialysis and transplant patients to be among the first priority groups to receive immunizations or antiviral medications if indicated. In addition to the high-risk designation, would you consider further measures specifically for ESRD patients?

Here are some suggestions we offer to blend with your existing state plan:

- ESRD expert representation on your panel of healthcare consultants
- The Network of New England be placed on your electronic list serve to receive any updates or information sent to acute care hospitals so that we may forward them to dialysis and transplant centers via fax blast or email
- The Network in partnership with DPH offers assistance to dialysis clinics in development of a preparedness plan for a pandemic flu outbreak
- Help identify potential pre-designated quarantine sites for dialysis patients and dialysis caregivers

- Distribute CMS publication “Preparing for Emergencies: A Guide for People on Dialysis,” and the Network of New England booklet: “Disaster and Diet Information” for dialysis patients.

We are eager to work with you in moving these suggestions forward. Please provide a contact person that we can directly communicate with on these matters. Thank you and we look forward to your reply.

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Cc: Kathleen Egan, CMS Project Officer
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