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ASHLEY FRANSCCELL/Daily Herald

Doctors, nurses and staff members at Utah Valley Regional Medical Center take a patient down a hallway toward a stairwell during an emergency drill on Thursday, Dec. 6, 2007 at at the hospital in Provo. This is the first drill for the hospital to simulate an evacuation in case of a disaster such as Hurricane Katrina or a wildfire.

Friday, 07 December 2007

UVRMC runs evacuation drill to prepare for disaster scenario



Brittani Lusk - DAILY HERALD

The lobby of Utah Valley Regional Medical Center was quiet Thursday morning. The automatic doors swung open and shut, someone whistled "Holly Jolly Christmas" and someone else dropped flowers off at the desk. This calm environment could be disrupted, though, if the hospital lost power.

Thursday morning, hospital staff prepared for just that, turning the lobby into a staging area where they transported inflatable dummies treated as patients. The emergency scenario involved a winter storm that knocked out power and a construction accident that caused a water line to break, flooding generators.

Hospitals have had to evacuate in situations like mass hurricanes and fires, and UVRMC wants to be prepared.

"I think a lot of hospitals learned a lot of things from Katrina," said UVRMC spokeswoman Janet Frank. "We need to practice."

On the fifth floor, where mothers were recovering from childbirth, nurses strapped an inflatable dummy dubbed "Leslie" to an evacuation sled, which looked like a Styrofoam stretcher with sides and orange fabric handles. In the dark, they transported her from the fifth floor down the stairs to the staging area.

Robin Ebmeyer, the emergency management coordinator for Intermountain Healthcare in Utah County, said the hospital used gray dummies in lieu of real people because it's safer.

"The first time you do it, you don't want it to be the real patient," Ebmeyer said. "It's just the exercise."

It was the first drill of its kind at UVRMC. Ebmeyer said hospitals are required to hold at least two emergency drills each year, using situations that could happen. A winter storm is probable in Provo.

She said the biggest challenge of the drill was communication, but the staff was ready and willing to help.

"You think you've communicated well with people and they do something different," Ebmeyer said. "Communication's a big deal."

Thursday, dummy patients like Leslie were evacuated floor by floor. Staff had to put patients in the evacuation sleds, and take them down to staging areas. They also had to take any equipment that the patient would need.

On the fifth floor, nurses and staff moved three dummies down to the lobby. In the event of a real evacuation, patients would be taken to other area hospitals.

"Luckily, we've got a lot of resources to call on," Frank said.

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