

January 26, 2006 Congressman Murtha Announces University of Pittsburgh Medical Center to Build a Strategic Biodefense System for the Region

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CONGRESSMAN MURTHA ANNOUNCES UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH MEDICAL CENTER TO BUILD A STRATEGIC BIODEFENSE SYSTEM FOR THE REGION

Pittsburgh, PA - At a news conference today, Congressman John Murtha and the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) announced that UPMC will build the Strategic Biodefense Emergency Operations and Communications System (SBEOCS). The SBEOCS, when developed, will make Pittsburgh a model for the rest of the nation on how to efficiently connect and provide up-to-the-minute information to health care providers, the Pennsylvania National Guard and local governments in the event of large-scale bioterror attacks, pandemics or other major emergencies that would result in serious public health consequences for a city or region.

"This unprecedented biodefense system will place western Pennsylvania's bioterrorism preparedness initiatives among the top tier in the United States. It will solve a national problem by providing a template to efficiently organize disaster responses so medical resources are directed to where they are most needed," said Jeffrey Romoff, president, UPMC.

As was clear in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, emergency response organizations, hospitals and health agencies do not have efficient and clear means of communicating critical information among themselves or the general public. This ambitious system will address many of these logistical concerns in ways few health or federal agencies have done previously.

Commenting on the SBEOCS, Congressman Murtha said, "Not only will this project develop a much-needed model for a comprehensive disaster-response system that can be used in cities across the nation, but it also will showcase this region as the center for a complex effort that will require innovative thinking, the incorporation of technology and the spirit of cooperation."

"Along with the UPMC Diabetes Institute and other initiatives underway in the region, this is a venture that will add to western Pennsylvania's ever-growing reputation as a hub for solutions to some of our most pressing medical problems," Congressman Murtha added.

In the event of a large-scale bioterror attack, decision-makers across many areas, including the Pa. National Guard; the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency; elected officials; hospital and public health leaders; and emergency responders will have short windows of time in which to make crucial decisions.

"As a first responder in domestic emergencies, the Pa. National Guard is well-positioned to assume the lead military role in protecting its citizens. We look forward to partnering with a world-class medical center like UPMC, where we will bolster this region's strength in biodefense and protect the homeland," said Col. P. Xavier Stewart, PhD.

"Specifically, this project will help us synthesize and organize data from disparate sources in ways that allows us, along with civic leaders, to determine the best possible distribution plan for scarce medicine and supplies in a region; the most rationale use of hospital beds and staff in the face of unprecedented numbers of patients; and the extent of disease spread in Pittsburgh and the surrounding region," added Col. Stewart.

"Basically, this system will combine UPMC's commitment and ability to provide top quality health care and information technology in Pittsburgh and the surrounding region with the substantial public health and emergency resource capacities of the city and region. The result will be organizations with the ability to make decisions, communicate, and take coordinated actions across a region during a crisis," added Tara O'Toole, M.D., chief executive officer of the UPMC Center for Biosecurity.

The SBEOCS also will include a vital public information component through which critical information can be shared with the citizens of the region. The biodefense web portal component of the SBEOCS will provide the general public with a user-friendly website that will contain critical information for coping with a disaster and its aftermath. There also will be personal and business disaster preparedness information available through this portal.

Another important component of SBEOCS will be its innovative training programs for first responders called the "Biodefense Schoolhouse." Medical research and technology development in the field of disaster medicine is rapidly and constantly evolving to meet the challenges of the changing environment. Therefore, the provision of the latest information tailored to the civilian and military first responder community is of vital importance and will be built into this system.

Both UPMC and the UPMC Center for Biosecurity will provide strategic oversight of the project, with Cliff Denholm, vice president and chief information officer, hospital division of UPMC serving as project director. Col. P. Xavier Stewart, PhD., director of military support to civil authorities will serve as project director for the Pa. National Guard. The project team will work with local and regional partners to ensure that the end product is mutually beneficial to decision makers and system users.

For a complete listing of existing UPMC's bioterrorism initiatives, please visit www.news bureau.upmc.com. For more information about the UPMC Center for Biosecurity, please visit www.upmc-biosecurity.org.