

Statement on the Uniform Emergency Volunteer Health Practitioners Act

This statement was developed by the Board of Governors' Committee on Socioeconomic Issues in collaboration with Operation Giving Back. It was approved by the Board of Governors and by the Board of Regents in October 2008.

Background

In 2006, the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws adopted a model bill to address the issue of health practitioners providing care during a declared emergency in states where they may not be licensed to practice. The Uniform Emergency Volunteer Health Practitioners Act (UEVHPA) was developed in response to the significant legal and licensing barriers to volunteer physicians and health care practitioners traveling to New Orleans, LA, and the Gulf Coast in response to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina.

In 2007, the American College of Surgeons' Board of Governors' Committee on Socioeconomic Issues and the Executive Committee of the Board of Governors discussed and endorsed the UEVHPA at its annual meeting and expressed that the Act should be aggressively and vocally supported by the College.

The purpose of UEVHPA

The UEVHPA establishes legal guidelines for recognizing other states' licenses for physicians and health care practitioners who volunteer to provide assistance during the time of a declared emergency. Since federal provisions for interstate cooperation do not extend to most private practitioners, UEVHPA calls for the creation of a registration system that out-of-state practitioners may use either before or during a disaster. Upon successful registration, practitioners are expressly permitted to contribute their professional skills to existing organized disaster efforts. In addition, it addresses issues of workers' compensation coverage and civil liability protections for physicians and other licensed health practitioners.

Why UEVHPA is important to surgery

Physicians are uniquely qualified to assist during disasters. In particular, surgeons, with their training in trauma and critical care, play a major role in our health care community's response to most disaster situations.

Properly trained volunteers are critical in such circumstances.

By enacting the UEVHPA, state legislatures can have a positive impact on disaster-response effectiveness. Removing barriers that prohibit licensed surgeons and other qualified responders from traveling across state lines to

voluntarily administer medically necessary care during disasters will ensure the citizens of their state access to high-quality surgical services in the event of a crisis.

The American College of Surgeons' Board of Regents supports enactment of the UEVHPA in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.