

RESPONDER SPOTLIGHT

Baltimore City Unrest

By Tony Gesualdo, Pharmacist

ALERT

I first learned about the Baltimore unrest while watching the news, especially since it was on all major channels – not just local news, but national and beyond. On the television, you see the destruction taking place in neighborhoods, people’s homes, and local businesses. You wonder how I can help, in any capacity. All they needed was a helping hand.

On April 27, 2015, I received an alert from Maryland Responds:

“The Governor has signed an Executive Order for proclamation of State of Emergency for Baltimore City. This is in response to the ongoing violent protests within the City. The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Office of Preparedness and Response will continue to monitor the situation.”

The message asked us to monitor our communications should volunteer assistance be requested.

ACTIVATION NOTIFICATION

I received a request from Maryland Responds for pharmacy volunteers. In it, they detailed the position description, where help was needed, and how to respond. I answered



the call. I was given a schedule of times and instructed where to report and who to report to.

DEPLOYMENT

The thing you didn’t see on TV are the people who are suffering the most. Due to the civil unrest in Baltimore City, several pharmacies closed leaving residents without life-saving medications. The elderly and the sick were the ones being held captive in their homes and unable to do anything about it. Residents were asked to contact 311 if they needed help obtaining their medication. The Baltimore City Health Department would work one-on-one with those residents to help them obtain their medication. As a Maryland Responds pharmacy volunteer, I deployed to assist in the call center.

I drove into Baltimore to the local health department. The health department staff

briefed me on what to do and gave my assignments. The task involved calling people back and getting their medication needs taken care of. These were people who had called 311 for help. I proceeded to call people who needed their medications and arranged for them to be able to obtain their medications.

I was able to use my pharmacy expertise and help people resolve their medication needs. These people were no longer alone and forgotten. They now had someone they could speak to, someone who cared, not a recording or busy line.

POST DEPLOYMENT

No words can express the feeling of helping someone in need. People who were by themselves were no longer alone – it was a great feeling. They know someone cares and you just made their day better. I am able to help lessen their pain, in more ways than one.

It was especially satisfying since being a pharmacist is what I do. I was able to use my expertise in helping people obtain their medications. And best of all, I finally had the chance to give back and volunteer – I was able to help just for the sake of helping.

I've been a pharmacist for over 40 years and this was one of my best experiences. I would be happy to volunteer in any capacity if the need should arise. I consider myself lucky to be able to do so. Thank you Maryland Responds for giving me this opportunity.