

EDITORIAL

An *Im-Perfect* Storm

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In a previous editorial, “Adapting to Change,”¹ I referred to an upcoming board meeting of the Society of Disaster Medicine and Public Health and an editorial board meeting of the *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness* journal. On December 4, 2013, the society’s board met in Baltimore, Maryland, at the Mount Washington Conference Center of Johns Hopkins University for an open meeting, which included the journal’s board and general members.

At the meeting, the need for a strategic plan with a clearly defined mission and specific objectives was emphasized, as was the need to ensure that the goals of the society and the journal were aligned and mutually supportive. A working group accepted this task, and will present the framework for discussion at the society’s headquarters in Bethesda, Maryland. Also at the December meeting, members of both the society and journal boards emphasized a need for the general members to become more involved with all aspects of the society and journal, particularly in the formative stages of their development and evolution. Additional discussions focused on the need for better communication and marketing, as well as a website to support these activities.

We invite and encourage the readership to visit the website (www.sdmph.org) as it evolves and to please report on recommendations for improving its utility and value. Finally, the importance of reaching out to groups such as the Medical Reserve Corps and students of health professions was underscored and, indeed, such efforts will be given increased attention.

Members of the journal’s editorial board and associate editors met on December 5th, also at Mount Washington, and discussed manuscript workflow, the need for additional journal board members in some areas, and increasing international representation on the board. New submission categories and the use of MeSH terms were covered as well. The editorial office had begun contacting all users who registered in the Manuscript Central (mc.manuscriptcentral.com/dmp) system, urging them to update their areas of expertise and key words. Moreover, the need to increase the reviewer pool was discussed at length and was thought to be critical to prevent the overuse

of current reviewers and to better process the increasing numbers of both domestic and international submissions. New guidelines for editors and reviewers will be developed and published in the April 2014 issue of this journal. In April, we also intend to report on the status of these initiatives as we move closer to finalizing a strategic plan and support a business model.

Triskaidekaphobia is defined as a fear of the number 13, for the society and the journal, 2013 was indeed a fearful year as we evolved the former and transitioned the latter. It was also a year during which many fearlessly confronted these new challenges and, because of their efforts, successfully weathered the storm. Another more recent storm in the Atlanta metroplex was not so successfully weathered and raised the all too familiar topic of “lessons learned.” From the photo essay appearing in this issue of the journal, two such lessons can be highlighted.

As to the importance of increasing early warning times, no one would debate their potentially positive impact in decreasing injury and loss of life from catastrophic events. However, shortening early warning times can only be effective when these warnings are heeded. The photograph on the cover of this issue characterizes the catastrophic effects of the recent snowfall on the Atlanta, Georgia, metroplex. It is obvious from Dr Cavanaugh’s portrayal of events that early-warning information was provided but not acted on by the great majority of the population—why? We currently lack the data to provide an objective answer to this question, but for those of us who have worked in this arena for years, the answer most likely resides in individuals believing that they will not be affected by the events. This delusional thinking, I believe, is one of the great shortcomings we have to overcome if resilient communities populated by resilient individuals will truly be developed.

The second takeaway lesson is not preparedness and response at the individual level but at the community and regional levels. Again, no data are available at present to support these conclusions, but the lack of integrated decision making between different jurisdictions within the public sector and various

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entities within the commercial sector was obvious. Yes, we have emergency operation centers and incident command systems, but how effectively do they integrate across geographic and municipal boundaries? In the myriad after-action reports and analyses of what went wrong, one would hope this critical question would be evaluated. Not only is it critical to the Atlanta metroplex but also to cities across the

nation, and possibly worldwide, to provide meaningful recommendations for improvement.

REFERENCE

1. James JJ. Adapting to change [editorial]. *Disaster Med Public Health Prep.* 2013;7(5):440.