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Health care heavyweights enlisted

D.C.'s new medical director for bioterrorism response
will take regional approach

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A retired physician from the Army Medical Corps has been tapped to coordinate the District's budding anti-bioterrorism efforts.

Col. Jeffrey Elting was named medical director for bioterrorism response coordination by the D.C. Hospital Association Aug. 2. Elting will report directly to DCHA President Bob Malson, who also is chairman of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' bioterrorism task force.

Elting will attempt to connect the health departments of 17 local jurisdictions and form a cohesive, regional bioterrorism defense plan. Elting also will coordinate funds made available from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Department of Defense and — if it's approved — the Department of Homeland Security.

While he doesn't have the authority to command where funds are spent, Elting expects his opinions and insight to be heard by hospital administrators and local and federal government officials.

Elting will be coordinating the funding and ensuring that it is applied properly.

"I'd like to make sure we don't duplicate efforts," Elting says, "and that we dedicate staff appropriately."

Elting says he will implement a newly drafted emergency plan and hopes to make the District "a model for bioterrorism defense."

The District is among the first cities in the country to hire someone specifically to coordinate a bioterrorism response.

PUTTING FUNDING TO WORK

DCHA (www.dcha.org) used money from a \$550,000 D.C. Health Department grant to hire Elting, who has a two-year contract. The health department (<http://dchealth.dc.gov>) is armed with \$37.8 million in federal funds to help combat bioterrorism, including \$11.9 million that was approved by HHS last month.

The region received a \$292 million congressional appropriation in January to implement

Connecting the region and combatting bioterrorism: Col. Jeffrey Elting is charged with coordinating a regional defense plan and helping decide where funds will be distributed.



JOANNE S. LAWTON / STAFF

emergency preparedness plans. Of that amount, the District received \$154 million.

"There's so much coming in ... the federal government is doing its part in ensuring that the funding is there for the need," Malson says.

Elting was chosen by DCHA, the D.C. Department of Health, the Medical Society of D.C., and the Medico-Chirurgical Society of D.C. A 25-year Army veteran, Elting most recently served as senior medical officer, directorate of health policy and clinical services in the Office of the Army Surgeon General. He served eight months in the Gulf War as a biomedical expert, working to detect dangerous biological agents such as anthrax.

He's been a White House physician since 1994, providing health care and medical consultation for the president, the vice president and their families.

GOING ON ROUNDS

Elting says the region already has the makings of a strong foundation, including a communica-

tions system among area hospitals, and a memorandum of understanding among hospitals during the event of a crisis.

But it will be his responsibility to maintain the momentum of bioterrorism response coordination in the region. Specifically, he will concentrate on the continued development of several key areas:

- Protection and detection initiatives, such as immunizations, protective equipment and bioterrorism;

- Event response initiatives, including decontamination, pharmaceutical stockpile management, hospital surge capacity, and quarantine capability; and

- Coordination of medical logistical initiatives, such as patient-tracking and public information.

Elting got a jump on his job by making the rounds with hospital CEOs and board members. Says Malson: "He's been very well-received by the people he's met with so far."

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