

# HSPR's New Operations Chief: Akiko Saito

SERV-OR



By Alyssa Bostian  
(Photo by Allan Visnick)

It is with great pride and excitement that we welcome Akiko Saito as the new Health Security, Preparedness and Response (HSPR) operations chief.

A little more than five years ago, Akiko Saito joined the HSPR staff as the State Medical Reserve Corps coordinator and ESAR-VHP project officer. Since her start with Oregon Health Authority (OHA) and HSPR, Akiko's demonstrated success has propelled positive change within OHA, local health departments, tribes, and other local entities, making Oregon a more prepared and healthy state.

Akiko's networking skills and "get-it-done" attitude have grown the Medical Reserve Corps program from nine units to 19 units in a five-year span. Akiko's work also spurred exponential growth within the State Managed Volunteer Pool (SMVP), which now has more than 1,400 volunteers ready to deploy in case of an emergency in Oregon or Southwest Washington.

In December 2008 Akiko proposed developing a statewide VISTA program that would recruit VISTAs interested in public health and place them in local governments in order to sustain MRC programs. In August 2009, the first 10 OHA VISTA team members began their service year. Since then, the OHA/AmeriCorps\*VISTA Partnership Project has grown and now places 30 members throughout the state. These team members work on many other public health projects in addition to MRC, including accreditation, tribal health, health equity, community wellness, resiliency for vulnerable populations, and special projects.

The significance of VISTA accomplishments goes far and above the service numbers previously mentioned. MRC units have moved to sustainable platforms using volunteer leaders to complete projects with minimal burden on staff. Local health departments are seeing a cultural shift toward continuous quality improvement that will benefit entire counties. The project also creates future public health leaders by training VISTA members in the complexities of governmental public health.

Akiko also has been an integral part of HSPR's responses to events and exercises, including (to name a few) H1N1; the radiological event from the tsunami in Japan; 2011 winter flooding; and the PACE Setter Exercise in 2013.

We are thrilled to see what Akiko can do as our new operations chief and are grateful for her continued efforts to make Oregon a more resilient state.

## Welcome new VISTAs serving your Medical Reserve Corps



By Jocelyn Lang

In September, the Oregon Health Authority/AmeriCorps\* VISTA Partnership Project welcomed 19 new VISTA members to its team. As Volunteers In Service To America, the full VISTA team now stands at 29 members — the largest team yet! Some VISTAs are local Oregonians, while others have traveled from around the

country, including California, Connecticut, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Ohio and Washington.

Each VISTA has a project focus for their year of service. Combined, these projects support the Partnership's goal to reduce poverty in local communities through building sustainable countywide wellness initiatives and taking a systems-approach to creating healthy communities. Some of the team members' project areas include public health agency accreditation, health equity, coordinated care organizations, emergency medical services, the Healthy People program, and the Medical Reserve Corps.

VISTAs hit the ground running last month and have already been busy attending conferences, building local partnerships, creating evaluation tools, recruiting volunteers, developing wellness plans, and much, much more. Chelsa Greene, a VISTA working with the Medical Reserve Corps in Washington County says of the program, "My VISTA year is off to an amazing start! The staff at Washington County have been welcoming and supportive of my transition into a new state, job and field of work. It is already obvious that the level of personal and professional development that I will experience throughout my VISTA year will prepare me for graduate school and allow me to explore and discover the niche of public health that suits me best."

Although only in their positions for a few weeks, VISTAs are already a strong presence at their worksites. Mimi Haley, who has been working with VISTA Jaclyn Testani at Columbia Pacific Coordinated Care Organization since late August stated, "Jaclyn is already a critically important member of the team. Go Jaclyn!"

Stay tuned for updates on the team's projects throughout the year.

# A Medical Reserve Corps for Curry County



By Eric Gebbie

On Aug. 9, 2013, Curry Community Health hosted a planning and informational meeting for stakeholders and the public. Located along the Southern Oregon Coast, rural Curry County is known for its breathtaking ocean, river and mountain views. Yet during an emergency, whether tsunami, storm or disease, Curry County could

be cut off from the rest of Oregon for weeks at a time.

Antone Hernandez, a retired readiness specialist in the community, spoke during the meeting about disaster realities in Curry County. His passionate speech addressed the continual issue of severe winter storms and the need for personal preparedness. "If we took a survey of all residents, I feel the majority would respond they are not prepared to be self-sustaining in the event of an emergency," said Hernandez.

Several leaders are emerging who hope to use their passion for emergency preparedness and health to make the community more resilient to disasters. Members of the leadership council include Beth Barker-Hidalgo of Curry Community Health, the local public health authority. Beth is joined by Don Kendall of Curry County Emergency Services and Andy Stubbs, a lieutenant with Brookings Fire Rescue.

"This is an organization that can be the pivot point to join all medical resources and does not interfere or make any one agency responsible for all the training. It is a volunteer base outside of department politics that can allow people to work together," said Andy Stubbs about his great support for a Medical Reserve Corps in Curry County.

The planning portion of the Aug. 9 meeting sought to describe roles for each of the leaders, ensuring the Medical Reserve Corps would fall on no one person's shoulders and to explore the parameters for start-up in Curry County. The leadership council has already received approval to house the Medical Reserve Corps within Curry Community Health and to submit their strategic plan by September of this year.

The second portion of the meeting focused on networking among organizations and community members. The history of MRC and the different roles one might play within the community was presented to a full room. Turnout was fantastic, from storeowners and managers, to those of the medical community, law enforcement, as well as assisted living. Event organizers remarked that the great attendance inspired them even more and that an active Medical Reserve Corps with multiple capacities was possible right here in rural Curry County.

## Three years of disaster training and SERV-OR expansion



By Eric Gebbie

The Oregon Health Authority recently closed out a three-year grant that saw massive expansion of training for SERV-OR volunteers around the state. In total, 42 class sessions were held in 17 communities.

The competitive grant was received from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in order to build Oregon's Emergency System for the Advanced Registration of Volunteer Health Professionals (ESAR-VHP), which is the framework for SERV-OR and Oregon's Medical Reserve Corps units.

Basic Disaster Life Support was held 26 times around the state, with a total of 832 participants. This day-long classroom course is a seven hour competency-based, awareness-level course that introduces concepts and principles to prepare health professionals for the management of injuries and illnesses caused by disasters and public health emergencies.

The Advanced Disaster Life Support (ADLS) course was held a total of seven times, with 172 total participants. This intense two-day course allows participants to demonstrate competencies in mass casualty management, and includes disaster scene simulation with live simulated victims. We owe a special thanks to the dozens of volunteers who played the roles of victims for this class. We discovered acting talent and ability to scream that surprised everyone. Oregon also was able to host two instructor classes that qualified 51 people to help serve as instructors for classes, which greatly reduces the cost for classes and engages volunteers and partners who want to give back through instruction.

All of the Disaster Life Support courses were taught or overseen by Alan Dobrowolski and the instructors from the accredited training agency at the REMSA, the Regional Emergency Medical Services Authority in Reno, Nevada. Participant feedback and formal evaluations of every course reflect the quality of the instruction; real-world experience brought to the classroom and hands-on sessions; and their impressive ability to engage health care workers in serious discussions about complicated crises.

The grant also funded burn classes in partnership with the Oregon Burn Center. A basic one-day course on mass casualty burn events was held five times with 126 participants. An advanced burn life support course for licensed providers was held twice, with 46 participants.

"The total amount of hours contributed by volunteers just by attending these classes is staggering," remarked Akiko Saito, Oregon's state Medical Reserve Corps coordinator and program officer for the grant. "We logged a total of 1,227 attendees and 10,064 hours."

The courses served both as training for current volunteers as well as a tremendous recruiting tool for potentially new volunteers who were interested in the topic but not yet registered with SERV-OR or their local Medical Reserve Corps. Current and potential volunteers can look forward to a new series of trainings that will begin in 2014, including a new course on wound care in the field.



By Sam Bakkila

Volunteer Connect held the annual Central Oregon Project Connect event at the Deschutes County Expo Center on Saturday, Sept. 28, 2013. A total of 804 professional and community volunteers provided services to 2,265 guests experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The medical section included 80 licensed

health care providers registered with SERV-OR.

This event serves the dual purpose of providing essential care to people in need, while simultaneously improving emergency preparedness by practicing the conversion of the Expo Center into a medical and dental care facility. The SERV-OR program participates in order to exercise the official deployment of large numbers of volunteer health care professionals.

Services provided at Project Connect included a general medical clinic, dental care, vaccinations, behavioral health, veterinary care, haircuts, and assistance with housing, employment, identity cards, and other social services. Overall, 67 community agencies participated in providing direct services at the event, as well as providing referrals and connections to ongoing services.

An AmeriCorps VISTA who volunteered at Project Connect in the dental area noted the great mood of the patients, many of whom had just had multiple teeth extracted. The dentists' great sense of humor kept the spirits of the patients high. One of the patients wrote a thank you note to her dentist, instructing him to "keep being a goofball."

Project Connect is based on a national model: Project Homeless Connect, which originated in San Francisco in October 2004. Today, Project Connect is emulated in more than 400 cities across the United States as well as Canada, Puerto Rico and Australia.

"If they didn't hear it enough that day, we really have to say thank you to the many, many volunteers who served," said Eric Gebbie, the SERV-OR systems coordinator. "The turnout of local volunteers and even volunteers from as far as Jackson County was tremendous — even at 7 a.m.!"

## American Red Cross and MRC Joint Shelter Exercise

SERV-OR



By Sophia Grimm

On Oct. 12, 2013, the American Red Cross (ARC), and Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) units from Linn, Marion and Yamhill counties came together for a full-scale shelter exercise to test joint deployment capabilities.

In our exercise scenario, Oregon declared a state of emergency in Marion County due to widespread flooding. One thousand residents were evacuated from a flooded neighborhood. Emergency Management requested that the ARC set up a 100-bed shelter. Aware that the evacuated neighborhood was largely comprised of individuals with functional needs and chronic medical conditions, the ARC asked the Marion County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to supply medical support staff for the shelter.

At 7:30 a.m., the ARC and MRC volunteers mobilized and began setting up the shelter. In addition to areas typically found in a shelter, 21 Marion MRC volunteers erected an infirmary in which to diagnose and treat evacuees. 11 Linn and four Yamhill MRC volunteers created a client services station dedicated to finding durable medical equipment, consumable medical supplies, and other critical resources left behind during the evacuation. Within an hour of arriving onsite, the ARC and MRC units were ready to receive evacuees!

Physically setting up the shelter and infirmary was not the only goal for this exercise. The goal was to turn the conceptual idea of how our organizations would work together into a tangible experience.

The interactive portion of the exercise was conducted twice, using 20 actor evacuees to ensure that the exercise challenged our systems of operation without overwhelming them. Ten were given a script describing a functional need or chronic condition and asked to role play. The other 10 were listed as members of the general population or caregivers. Much thanks to our evacuees; we couldn't have done this without you!

We encourage other units to also pursue partnership opportunities with our partners at the American Red Cross.

OREGON PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION