Philadelphia University Offers New M.S. Degree in Disaster Medicine and Management

*Graduates will be trained to manage large-scale medical disasters*


With public attention riveted on the seemingly endless events – both natural and manmade – that threaten human life today, Philadelphia University this fall is offering a new Master’s of Science program to train experts in disaster medicine management.

The M.S. in Disaster Medicine and Management is one of a small, but growing, number of programs of its kind nationwide. Philadelphia University’s program will focus on educating experts to manage large-scale disasters and facilitate the delivery of the best possible medical response to as many people as possible in an emergency setting.

When the Federal Emergency and Management Agency (FEMA) started its Higher Ed Project in 1995 to encourage colleges and universities to develop courses in emergency and disaster management, only four institutions were offering such programs. Now, a growing number of institutions are developing programs, which focus on various aspects of the field, such as emergency management, disaster research and public health issues. Philadelphia University’s disaster medicine and management program will be the first full-degree program in the Delaware Valley region.

Driving this need for highly-trained and educated professionals is the rapid escalation in the number of severe disaster events in recent decades, resulting in a 15-fold increase in the global costs of dealing with disasters, according to FEMA. At the same time, the number of people affected by disasters tripled between the 1970s and 1990s. Part of the increase is due to human behavior, such as building in coastal areas, along earthquake fault lines and near forests that put people and property at risk.

Philadelphia University’s Disaster Medicine and Management program is partnering with Albert Einstein Healthcare Network to provide professionals with the ability to face a wide range of natural disasters, mass-casualty events and public-service disruptions, such as power grid failure. Students will learn disaster-planning and management skills, including risk assessment, incident command and resource allocation, as well as the public-health considerations and psychological aspects of disasters.

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“There’s a critical need in the U.S. and worldwide for adequately trained and educated leaders who can take charge in times of disaster, helping to allay the loss of human life and property and treat the wounded,” said Matt Baker, dean of Philadelphia University’s School of Science and Health, who helped develop the program. “We are proud to be among the institutions that are helping to meet the critical need for disaster managers and pleased to be offering a high-quality program with distinguished and experienced faculty members in the field.”

The partnership with Albert Einstein and Philadelphia University’s history of delivering professional education in health are unique strengths that make the new program an important academic offering in the post-9/11 world.

The M.S. in Disaster Medicine and Management is aimed at working adults in health-related fields, including doctors, nurses, emergency medical technicians, physician assistants, paramedics, environmental health professionals, healthcare, public safety and government administrators and military personnel.

The program is primarily distance-based, although students are required to attend a one-week session on campus that will focus on hands-on skills labs, seminars and disaster drills. The distance-learning component not only allows students from all over the world to participate, but is designed to accommodate health care professionals who may not work during typical day-time hours.

Some of the required courses are Hazardous Materials and Industrial Safety, Natural Disasters, Principles of Terrorism, Psychological Aspects of Disasters, Disaster Emergency Planning and Public Health Implications of Disasters.

The program’s medical director is Dr. Steven Parillo, D.O., a board-certified emergency medicine physician who is chairman of Albert Einstein Medical Center’s Emergency Management Committee and director of its HAZMAT program. Also on the faculty are Dr. David Jaslow, M.D., M.P.H., who is chief of the Division of EMS, Operational Public Health and Disaster Medicine at Einstein Medical Center; Dr. John Krimm, D.O., an experienced emergency medicine physician; and Aaron Richman, EMT-P, M.B.A., a paramedic and former captain of the Jerusalem police, who has vast experience in emergency management, law enforcement and counterterrorism in the U.S. and Israel. The program’s director, Jean Will, Ed.D., M.S.N., EMT-P, is a nurse and paramedic who is certified by the American Board for Certification in Homeland Security.

Philadelphia University, founded in 1884, is a private university with 3,200 full- and part-time students enrolled in more than 50 undergraduate and graduate programs. The University includes Schools of Architecture, Business Administration, Design and Media, Engineering and Textiles, Liberal Arts and Science and Health.

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Albert Einstein Healthcare Network is a private, non-profit organization with six major facilities and additional outpatient centers. A leader in medical education, the Network’s Department of Emergency Medicine delivers state-of-the-art care at four sites, and runs the region’s only fellowship program for emergency medicine physicians in disaster medicine. It also operates a Center for Special Operations Training and Office of Weapons of Mass Destruction Education.

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