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EMERGENCY MENTAL HEALTH, DISASTER RESPONSE CONFERENCE TO ADDRESS CURRENT ISSUES RELATED TO BIOTERRORISM, STRESS

In these uncertain times of potential biological, chemical or nuclear warfare, mental health issues and disaster preparedness are issues of concern to both the public and professionals. To help address trauma and other issues related to multiple types of disaster, the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services is hosting an "Emergency Mental Health and Disaster Response Conference" March 13-14.

The conference will be held at the University of Central Oklahoma, 2nd and Garland Godfrey Drive in Edmond, in the third floor ballroom of the Nigh University Center.

The program is designed to provide state, county and local level administrators, as well as mental health professionals, first responders and other interested citizens, with a comprehensive overview of disaster mental health services, said ODMHSAS Commissioner Dr. Terry Cline.

"Virtually every day, we read or hear about issues that, for many people, may be quite frightening and stressful," Cline said. "When the government encourages us to set up a 'safe room' in our homes and stockpile food, water, plastic sheeting and duct tape to prepare for chemical or biological attack, we are exposed to significant stress. At this particular time in world history, many people are living on-edge, not sure what to expect next."

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The conference will bring together a number of experts familiar with disaster planning, post-traumatic stress disorder and related mental health issues. Workshops are planned on such topics as bioterrorism, hazards planning, substance abuse, effective media relations during crises, community collaboration and disaster mental health planning.

In addition to the state mental health department, other sponsors include the Oklahoma Department of Civil Emergency Management, Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Oklahoma Department of Health, University of Oklahoma Southwest Center for Public Health Preparedness and OU Health Sciences Center Department of Psychiatry.

Registration is \$60 for the entire conference or \$30 per day. For more information, or to register, contact the ODMHSAS Human Resource Development Division at 405-522-8300.

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