

A BASIC MEDICAL KIT FOR A 10-20 PERSON SHELTER

compiled by Jane M. Orient, MD, with assistance from many others

Patients often ask what medical supplies they should store. This is a very good question; after a nuclear war it might be easier to find some person with medical knowledge than to locate drugs and supplies. The question is very difficult to answer. Every physician would make a different list.

No physician today would like to be without certain drugs, especially antibiotics. Unfortunately, all drugs are perishable. After the expiration date, they begin to lose their potency, and some (especially tetracycline) may contain toxic byproducts. This means that supplies should be rotated, increasing the cost of this type of "insurance." However, most of us, in a desperate emergency, would use outdated drugs in preference to none at all.

In putting together your own kit, you will need to take your own family's situation into consideration. And you will need the cooperation of your physician for obtaining prescription drugs. Finally, you will need to consider how much you can afford to spend. Do not buy drugs until the basics (food, water, ventilation, shelter, etc.) are provided. Remember that the human race survived for many centuries without modern medicine -- but could not survive more than a few days without water.

In constructing this list, various assumptions are made about the situation. One is that major surgery will not be practical under shelter conditions. This requires highly trained personnel and at least \$1000 worth of instruments. A person with appendicitis would have a better chance with antibiotics and rest, taking nothing by mouth except medications and clear liquids, than with surgery by amateurs. (In the event of a nationwide disaster such as a nuclear war, our lack of protected hospitals like those that exist in Switzerland would cost lives that might be saved.)

Many items could be added to the list. For example, persons who know what to do with them might want to store materials for splinting or casting fractures (which could be splinted by expedient means in the absence of such materials). Intravenous solutions (and the means of administering them) might also be stored. Because of expense, space requirements, and the need for some expertise in their use, they are not listed here.

Wholesale prices, when available, are given in brackets.