The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro  
Comptroller General of the United States  
Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

In the wake of September 11, 2001, Congress has taken steps to ensure hospitals are adequately prepared to handle mass-casualty events such as bioterrorism attacks and natural disasters. One of those steps included the establishment of the Hospital Preparedness Cooperative Agreement Program (HPP). The 2006 Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act (P.L. 109-417) moved the HPP program under the authority of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) of the Department of Health and Human Services. Under the ASPR, the HPP’s mission is to ensure hospitals can handle the surge capacity associated with a public health emergency or mass-casualty event without notice.

In 2008, GAO released a report entitled *Emergency Preparedness: States Are Planning for Medical Surge, but Could Benefit from Shared Guidance for Allocating Scarce Medical Resources* (GAO-08-668), which evaluated how states and the federal government are using funds to prepare for medical surges. While that report has provided some insight on surge capacity preparation, we write to request that GAO conduct a study on the availability, capacity and preparedness of health systems to provide surge capacity to address public health emergencies, including ambulatory, hospital, emergency and trauma care systems. Specifically, we ask you to study:

1. Current surge capacity within health systems, including patient capacity in hospital emergency departments and trauma centers; the number and sufficiency of the providers of emergency and trauma care; the sufficiency of community EMS systems; the degree of integration with surrounding regional health care assets; and whether these health
systems are prepared to handle a public health emergency, including a mass-casualty event without notice;

2. The impact of current federal grant programs, including the HPP and Public Health Emergency Preparedness grants, on improving the readiness of health systems to manage a public health emergency as described in (1);

3. Gaps in the collection of data related to the adequacy of these health systems; and,

4. Recommendations to address any issues identified under (1), (2) and (3), and to ensure appropriate medical response of day-to-day operations and the ability to surge such capacity for public health emergencies.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this request. Please contact Committee Majority staff Clay Alspach at (202) 225-2927 or Committee Minority staff Ruth Katz at (202) 225-3641 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Fred Upton
Chairman

Henry Waxman
Ranking Member