

Safety Tips & Guidelines Regarding Potential “Active Shooter” Incidents Occurring on Healthcare Organization Campuses

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Healthcare organizations have many safeguards and work continuously to maintain a safe place for internal and external publics. However, such incidents can never be completely prevented, and healthcare organization campuses are vulnerable. This document is being provided to assist in the development of strategies to mitigate and respond to an active shooter situation within a healthcare facility. The document is provided in four parts: Pre-Incident Prevention and Preparation, Management During and Incident, Post Event management and Safety Tips for Personnel.

These safety tips and guidelines are not all inclusive, but if understood and followed up with periodic reminders and training when feasible, it can increase your chances of surviving an active shooter incident.

Active Shooter Defined

- The situation is a barricaded suspect(s) or a movement situation where the suspect(s) is actively discharging a firearm at law enforcement or community members and or randomly firing into an area where it is reasonably expected that persons could be struck by the suspect(s) fire. These situations leave little or no time for proper planning and normally require first arriving law enforcement units to take immediate action to end the danger.

I PRE-INCIDENT PREVENTION AND PREPARATION

a. Pre-Employment Screening

Employers who conduct effective background checks can often improve productivity and reduce the number of personnel prone to exhibiting violent behaviors. Screening of contractors and vendors should also be considered as part of the program.

b. Ongoing Staff Evaluations

- When appropriate, obtain fitness-for-duty evaluations of employees exhibiting seriously dysfunctional behaviors at the workplace.

- Educate managers and supervisors to recognize early warning signs.

c. Community Relationships

There are many programs and resources in the community that can help you develop your workplace violence plans.

- Invite local police into your organization to promote good relations and to help them become more familiar with your facility. The police can explain what actions they typically take during incidents involving threats and violence. Such visits can help your organization work better with police when incidents do occur.
- Use law enforcement and security experts to educate employees on how to prevent violence in the workplace. Such experts can provide crime prevention information, conduct building security inspections, and teach employees how to avoid being a victim.

d. Security Management Plan

Periodic review of security policies and procedures will help minimize your organization's vulnerability to violence and other forms of crime.

- Use, maintain, and regularly review appropriate physical security measures, such as electronic access control systems, silent alarms and video cameras in a manner consistent with applicable state and federal laws.
- Conduct risk assessments to determine mitigation strategies within points of entry, areas where medication and money are present or where other unique risks may exist.
- Develop protocol for screening of visitors, vendors and others who may enter the building. This may include the use of electronic surveillance equipment such as metal detectors where risk assessments deem.
- Use, maintain and review systems for automatic lock-down or establish a procedure for manual lock-down of the facility.
- Establish minimum criteria for allowing access and employment to the hospital (i.e. pre-employment screening).
- Establish process for staff to report persons of concern to Security for monitoring, additional scrutiny or intervention.
- Establish process for staff to alert security of the existence of "restraining orders" or other official restrictive orders being in place for a patient or employee.
- Evaluate need for emergency call boxes within parking lots, garages and other remote locations.
- Establish a lockdown plan that would include processes for full and zoned lockdown, the removal of individual access control privileges, and points of entry for responding personnel.

e. Improve Internal/External Communications

Employees should have a means to alert others in the workplace to a dangerous situation and to provide information requested by emergency responders.

- Provide panic or silent alarms in high risk areas
- Establish an emergency notification code that institutes immediate responsive actions by all personnel.
- Provide emergency call boxes or other services for emergent notification in remote areas outside the building.
- Communication system should provide a means to continually inform occupants of the event status (i.e. repeating that the event code is still in effect over the public address system, regular email messaging to department computers, or central communication board of network portal).
- Use available external communication systems with community partners to report events and needs (i.e. EMSsystem, Web EOC, HAN, etc.)

f. Establish Ground Rules for Behavior

Organizations that do not tolerate drug abuse or aggressive interaction lower the risk of workplace violence.

- Organizations should inform employees about policies concerning drugs, violent acts, and possession of weapons so that employees know exactly what is expected of them.
- Disseminate to all employees a policy of zero tolerance to threats or actual violence at the workplace. For example, discipline or terminate every threat-maker if the complaint is substantiated.
- Establish a policy applicable to everyone employed by the healthcare organization or on its property, including the parking lot, prohibiting the possession of weapons which have not been authorized by your organization.
- Provide similar expectation to patients, visitors, vendors, contractors and medical staff as part of their facility orientation.

g. Employee and Manager Training

- Have information about the potential for violence in the workplace, how to recognize the early warning signs of a troubled or potentially violent person, how to respond to those individuals, and how to report such incidents available for your employees.
- Educate employees on defined emergency response processes.

h. Reporting Procedures

- All employees should know how and where to report violent acts or threats of violence.
- Maintain an internal tracking system of all threats and incidents of violence.
- When a threat has been made or an incident has occurred, evaluate the situation and, if warranted, notify the potential victims and/or police.

i. Prepare a Threat Management Plan

It is important to prepare a threat management plan so when a threat does occur everyone will know there is a policy and will understand what to do. The plan might include:

- Define an emergency alert call for the existence and use of a weapon by a shooter in the building.
- Define steps all staff will take to secure their department, collect visitors and others from public (unsecured) areas and for controlled exiting of the building.
- Establish transfers of authority process for scene response to responding law enforcement (refer to National Incident Management System (NIMS) guidance for authority transfers).
- Include post event recovery actions.
- Designating a threat management team.
- Designating a mental health support team.
- Providing guidance concerning liaison with outside assistance.
- Providing guidance developed in concert with local authorities for collecting and preserving evidence, including interviews of involved parties.
- Managing of communications regarding the incident, for example, media relations, internal communications, and possible use of a rumor control desk.
- Managing the release of sensitive information where appropriate.
- Assigning responsibilities for contacting the families of victims.
- Managing clean-up and repairs.
- Providing employees and their families with information about their benefits.
- Recognize and define how law enforcement will respond- hostage method or forcible entry.
- Educate staff on expectations and exercise the plan.

j. Use All Available Resources

- When appropriate, obtain fitness-for-duty evaluations of employees exhibiting seriously dysfunctional behaviors at the workplace.
- Coordinate with local law enforcement and community mental health agencies to train staff.

II MANAGEMENT DURING AN INCIDENT

In a Department or Office

- Utilize your organization's emergency contact procedure.
- If you are in a room or office, STAY THERE, secure the door.
- If the door has no lock and the door opens in, look for heavy furniture to barricade the door.
- If the door has a window, cover it if you can.
- Depending on the gunman's location, consideration may also be made to exit through window openings. Have someone watch as you get as many individuals out of the windows (ground floor) as calmly and as quietly as possible.
- If no police units are yet on scene move well away from the incident and find safe cover positions (not the parking lots), and wait for the police to arrive.
- If officers arrive on scene, individuals should get out and move toward any police vehicle when safe to do so while keeping their hands on top of their head and **do exactly and immediately what the police tell you to do.**
- Don't leave the area entirely; you may have information that responding police officers will need. Once in a safe place, stay put.
- If the windows don't open, or you cannot break them, or you are not on a ground floor, get out of sight from the door and stay low and quiet.

In Hallways or Corridors

- If in the hallways, get in a room not already secured and secure it.
- Unless you are very close to an exit, don't run through a long hall to get to one. You may encounter the gunmen or hostage taker. Don't hide in restrooms!

In Large Rooms or Auditoriums

- If in a large room or auditorium and the gunman or hostage taker(s) are not present, move to and out the external exits and move toward police. Again keeping your hands on your head. Do what the police tell you!

Trapped with the Shooter(s)

- If you are trapped with the shooter(s), don't do anything to provoke them. If they are not shooting, do what they say and don't move suddenly. Only you can draw the line on what you will or will not do to preserve your life or the lives of others.
- If they do start shooting people, you need to make a choice, (*at this point it is your choice*) stay still and hope they don't shoot you, run for an exit while zigzagging, or even attack the shooter. This is very dangerous, but certainly no more than doing nothing and dying in place. A moving target is much harder to hit than a stationary one and the last thing the shooter will expect is to be attacked by an unarmed person. Any option chosen may still result in a negative consequence.
- Again this is **not a recommendation** to attack the shooter, but rather a choice to fight when there is only one other option.

Open Spaces

- Stay alert and look for appropriate cover locations. Brick walls, large trees, retaining walls, parked vehicles and any other object which may stop firearm ammunition penetration, may be utilized as cover.

If You Are a Victim

- A good description will be vital to the police, so try to remember everything you can about the thief, robber or assailant. Important things to look for are
 - height and weight
 - race
 - sex
 - age
 - color of hair and haircut
 - complexion
 - facial hair (beard, mustache, sideburns)
 - color of eyes and eyeglasses
 - scars or other unusual marks
 - speck including accent or lisp
 - clothing
 - jewelry
 - weapon
 - vehicle color and make
 - license number
 - direction of escape

III POST EVENT MANAGEMENT

a. Trauma Plan

Helping employees with the psychological consequences of workplace violence is the humane thing to do. It also greatly helps to reduce financial losses caused by absence, loss of productivity among employees, and workers' compensation claims.

After a violent incident, provide information and offer counseling services to employees and their families.

Following a violent incident, employees experience three stages of "crisis reactions" to varying degrees:

Stage One. In this stage, the employee experiences emotional reactions characterized by shock, disbelief, denial, or numbness. Physically, the employee experiences shock or a fight-or-flight survival reaction in which the heart rate increases, perceptual senses become heightened or distorted, and adrenaline levels increase to meet a real or perceived threat.

Stage Two. This is the "impact" stage where the employee may feel a variety of intense emotion, including anger, rage, fear, terror, grief, sorrow, confusion, helplessness, guilt, depression, or withdrawal. This stage may last a few days, a few weeks, or a few months.

Stage Three. This is the "reconciliation stage" in which the employee tries to make sense out of the event, understand its impact, and through trial and error, reach closure of the event so it does not interfere with his or her ability to function and grow. This stage may be a long-term process.

While it is difficult to predict how an incident will affect a given individual, several factors influence the intensity of trauma. These factors include the duration of the event, the amount of terror or horror the victim experienced, the sense of personal control (or lack thereof) the employee had during the incident, and the amount of injury or loss the victim experienced (i.e., loss of property, self-esteem, physical well-being, etc.). Other variables include the person's previous victimization experiences, recent losses such as the death of a family member, and other intense stresses.

b. Support Prosecution of Offenders

To prevent further incidents from occurring and to show their support of the victims, employers should support prosecution of offenders.

- Accommodate employees after a violent incident so they can make court appearances and work with the prosecution.

- Cooperate with law enforcement authorities to help identify and prosecute offenders through the use of any means at your disposal, such as crime stoppers, rewards.

c. Evaluate Security After a Threat

The threat management team should review risks and determine what additional security measures, if any, should be put in place after an incident.

- If warranted, provide increased work-site protection when serious threats of violence have been made. Such protection might include requesting additional police patrols, hiring security guards, and/or alerting organizations or people who might be affected.
- Seek guidance and training on what procedures should be taken to screen mail and packages after a threat has been made or after a large-scale layoff. Contact the U.S. Postal Service or local police for guidance.

IV TIPS FOR EMPLOYEES

A. Make Your Workplace Secure

- If you are the last to leave your department, ensure the doors are locked and your area is secure.
- Report any broken lights or locks.
- Know the locations of the fire exits in your building.
- Keep your purse locked in a drawer or closet.
- Know the telephone numbers for security, police and fire departments.
- Keep track of the office keys in your possession, storing them in a secure place. Do not hand them out to unauthorized persons.

B. Safety in Transit

- Don't get in elevators with people who look out of place or behave in a strange or threatening way. Report such individuals to security or the police.
- Use caution when entering stairwells. Stairwells can be traps as well as a way to save time or get some exercise. Never enter a stairwell to escape pursuers or potential attackers. Go to an office where there are other people.
- Be extra cautious when using restrooms in isolated locations, poorly lighted, or open to the public.

C. Parking Lot Sense

- Park in well-lighted, heavily traveled areas if possible. If you know you are going to be staying late, check for lights when you park in the morning. If there are no spaces near lights, move your car to a better location at noon or when other employees begin to leave for the day.
- Always lock your car and roll the windows up all the way. If you notice any strangers lurking in the parking lot, notify security or the police immediately.
- Don't leave any valuable items in plain view inside your car. Leave them at home or lock them in the trunk.
- When you approach your car, have your key ready and check the floor and back seats before you get in.
- Avoid blind corners. Take wide turns so you have room to react to what's ahead.
- Walk in the center of the aisles when safe to do so. You'll have more reaction time if someone leaps out from behind a car.
- Walk with confidence. Criminals can often sense when you feel vulnerable, and this may entice them.

D. Office Security

- Keep your purse, wallet, or other valuable items with you at all times or locked in a drawer or closet. Don't leave a purse on a desk or a wallet in a jacket that's left on a chair or coat rack.
- Never leave the keys lying about.
- Never leave change or cash on the desk or in a top drawer. Instead, place any cash in an envelope and put it in a drawer that you can lock.
- Check the identification of any strangers who ask for confidential information or any delivery or repair persons who want to enter an area restricted to employees. Don't be afraid to call for verification. Be extra alert while they are there.
- If you notice any suspicious persons or vehicles, notify security personnel or the police.

E. General Awareness

- Be responsible for questioning and/or reporting strangers to supervisors.
- Be aware of any threats, physical or verbal, and/or any disruptive behavior of any individual and report such to supervisors.
- Be familiar with local procedures for dealing with workplace threats and emergencies.
- Do not confront individuals who are a threat.
- Be familiar with the resources of the Employee Assistance Program.
- Take all threats seriously

F. Indicators of Violent Situations

The following are warning indicators of potential workplace violence:

- Intimidating, harassing, bullying, belligerent, or other inappropriate and aggressive behavior.
- Numerous conflicts with customers, co-workers, or supervisors.
- Bringing a weapon to the workplace (unless necessary for the job), making inappropriate references to guns, or making idle threats about using a weapon to harm someone.
- Statements showing fascination with incidents of workplace violence, statements indicating approval of the use of violence to resolve a problem, or statements indicating identification with perpetrators of workplace homicides.
- Statements indicating desperation (over family, financial, and other personal problems) to the point of contemplating suicide.
- Direct or veiled threats of harm.
- Substance abuse.
- Extreme changes in normal behaviors.