

Connection

Timely information for best practices

July 2017



Practicing Good Citizenship in an Emergency

New CMS requirements address Emergency Preparedness and while the requirements are focused on performing a range of risk assessments, the driving concept is more universal: how to be a good citizen in the world of health care.

When a devastating tornado struck Joplin, Missouri on a Sunday afternoon in May 2011, St. John's Regional Medical Center was at the epicenter. Hearing weather emergencies announced wasn't unusual in the 367-bed, nine story hospital located in "Tornado Alley." Drills for exactly this type of emergency were frequent but this was not a drill. Within 15 minutes of the announcement to prepare there was a new announcement to take cover.

It took only 45 seconds for the tornado to tear through the hospital, causing catastrophic damage. The windows blew out. Interior walls and ceilings were torn open or destroyed by water from broken pipes. Power lines were downed

and the main and back-up generators torn from their foundations, so damaged that they failed. The life flight helicopter was destroyed.

The hospital census included one surgery in progress, one patient in PACU, 28 patients in the critical care unit, 10 in labor and delivery, and 24 in the ER. In total, 183 patients, 100 staff, and uncounted visitors required evacuation from the badly damaged building.

Citizenship in Action

Elementary school children in the U.S. are taught five themes associated with good citizenship. This story of a hospital, nearby but unaffiliated healthcare facilities and a community at large exemplifies these themes.

Compassion. The notion of caring for others is thoroughly embedded in the psyches of those who work in healthcare. In Joplin, compassionate response extended well beyond these professionals. Community action was immediate and even accidental neighbors responded. The traveling circus that happened to be in town preparing for a performance used elephants to help remove cars and heavy debris from roads, clearing a path for first responders confronted with blocked access to the hospital.

Respect. Good citizenship extends beyond respect for people to respect for ideas and values. Sometimes emergency drills and planning become rote exercises. In Joplin, these exercises became living templates for how to behave when trauma risks overwhelming the capacity for conscious planning.

Responsibility. Responsibility in an emergency is the willingness to take action. Those traumatized by experiencing the chaos and danger that engulfed them still managed to take action as needed. Others who had the ability to fill a need by providing extra hands, a pick-up truck, or other resources, acted without prompting.

Courage. The courageous response is doing the right thing even when unpopular or, as in this case, difficult or dangerous.

Honesty. One of the most challenging times for this aspect of citizenship is in the aftermath of an event. Shortly after the tornado, leaders from local hospitals gathered to share insights into their experience and assemble a list of lessons learned to be applied to future events. The extensive list identified mistakes and included many issues commonly reported after other types of disasters: complications resulting from loss of power; need for increased security; not enough flashlights; communication breakdowns; and challenges

feeding and caring for patients and staff. The list also included smaller but specific and valuable insights into needs that had not been considered in emergency management planning, among them:

- During a tornado alert, place a patient's shoes on their bed so they are available in the event of an evacuation (to walk over glass and other debris).
- When you evacuate patients into the hallway during a tornado, convert all possible intravenous lines to a lock to avoid the use of IV poles; they become dangerous projectiles.
- During evacuation, place newborns in the arms of the fathers and focus evacuation efforts on the mothers.
- Store emergency supplies where you plan to use them. Make sure they are easily transportable; pallet jacks will not work in debris fields and stairwells.
- Establish "scrub racks" with many sizes to keep staff in suitable clothing.
- Lighting needs to be hands free to provide suitable clinical care.

The process of risk assessment that is at the center of the new CMS regulation is really an opportunity to examine the interconnectedness of a health care community. Know your contacts at the local, state and federal level for a range of possible emergencies. Consider drills that focus on processes and procedures for times of power failure, loss of utilities, and communication disruptions; they may reveal areas for improved cooperation within a facility and well beyond its doors.

Resources for conducting emergency drills

The growing library of AAAHC Patient Safety Toolkits includes *Emergency Drills*, a resource for how to prepare, conduct and evaluate scenario-based drills. [Order here.](#)

We also offer a free poster discussing how to run a drill for a malignant hyperthermia emergency. Email marketing@aaahc.org to request a copy.

Upcoming educational programs

Achieving Accreditation will be held in Washington, DC, September 22-23. [Register here](#) for the program that includes a first look at the 2018 Standards.

Contact Us

AAAHC

5250 Old Orchard Road Suite 200

Skokie, IL 60077

P: 847.853.6060 F: 847.853.9028

info@aaahc.org

www.aaahc.org