

Trying to know what we don't know

HOSPITAL PREPARING FOR THE UNEXPECTED AS DNC DRAWS NEAR

The upcoming Democratic National Convention (DNC) in Denver August 25-28, with its threats of protests and general disruption, is a black box of uncertainty for health care providers – including those at University of Colorado Hospital – who are nervously gearing up for the unknown.



UCH has been preparing for possible additional resource demands imposed by the DNC specifically, and emergency situations in general, for months, say safety officers Jim Feist and Tim Close.

Preparations aren't new. "Ninety-nine percent of the agenda at regular meetings of the Emergency Management Committee has been issues related to the DNC," Feist says. "However,

we're not just preparing for the convention. We've had activities going on for some time to prepare the hospital for any emergency/disaster situation."

Those preparations included UCH participation in a June exercise that tested the response of hospitals, fire departments and emergency medical services to a fictitious dirty bomb explosion that required increased security and levels of communication, decontamination procedures and systems in place to handle a patient surge.

A late July exercise verified and tested intercommunications between the Aurora Office of Emergency Management, UCH and other hospitals, and the Aurora Fire and Police departments.

UCH and The Children's Hospital have scheduled another "live" exercise, similar to the June event, on August 19.

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The surge means working. Although no one, of course, knows what – if anything – is in store for UCH during the convention, Feist says the hospital has to be prepared for an "unanticipated surge of patients." Hospitals near "ground zero" in downtown Denver – especially Denver Health – could be overwhelmed with patients if, for example, an explosion occurs. UCH, in turn, would handle patient overflow; and, as the region's primary treatment facility for burn victims and a Level II trauma facility, it would be expected to treat a large number of serious injuries.

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With that in mind, Feist notes, “All floors have been told to staff accordingly during the convention, and all departments have been asked to double the number of on-call staff.”

Keeping communication lines open. Preparing for an emergency situation, Close stresses, requires communication between supervisors and staff. “If you’re not available during the DNC, let your supervisor know, so he or she won’t bother calling.”

The hospital will broadcast information about emergencies through AlertFind™, a new system for notifying UCH staffers and physicians when the computer network is affected. Using the contact information in PeopleSoft, AlertFind™ gets messages to people through a succession of channels like land lines, cell phones, pagers and email. It informs people of the issue briefly, gives them instructions, and has them respond to let the system know they’ve been contacted. (See “New Way to Contact Employees” this issue.)

During an emergency, for example, access to the campus could be disrupted abruptly, Feist says. The broadcast system in that case would inform employees about alternate routes to take to get to work.

Employees respond to the AlertFind™ message using the PIN number 80045, which will be stated right in the communication they receive. Close says employees should be sure to update their contact information through PeopleSoft.

Communications between the hospital, The Children’s Hospital and University of Colorado Denver also have been beefed up. Each facility has its own Incident Command Center (ICC), which organizes each group’s response to an emergency situation. The command centers will be in a stand-by mode throughout the DNC to allow ongoing, campus-wide communications through multiple channels and will remain in close contact with a command center established on the Auraria Campus, a short distance from the Pepsi Center.

Feist and Close encourage employees to review information on preparing for and responding to a disaster of any kind. Written materials are available on iAmaze under Policies and Procedures. Click Safety and Disaster Policies and Emergency Operations Plan.

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