Incident Planning Guide: Staff Shortage

Definition

This Incident Planning Guide is intended to address issues associated with a staff shortage. Hospitals may customize this Incident Planning Guide for their specific requirements.

Scenario

Your hospital staff is represented by multiple labor unions. Contract negotiations have been ongoing for several days but several key issues have remained unresolved. Although negotiations continue, union officials made statements yesterday that a strike including nursing was likely. A report of the planned labor action reached the local news channels and was included in their 6:00 PM and 11:00 PM reports yesterday. At 6 AM today the expected staff walkout was ordered by the union and the Incident Commander activated the Hospital Command Center. The hospital's inpatient census is 90%, with a full schedule planned for the operating room and outpatient clinics. Physicians, patients, and family members begin calling the hospital to ask about whether scheduled patient care services would continue. The night shift nursing teams are saying they will not return on their next planned shift and will not cross any picket lines. At the direction of the union, many day shift staff are also not reporting to work nor calling in to notify of their absence despite work rules requiring notification. Nursing and other licensed staff who do not normally provide direct patient care have been asked to provide inpatient care. Unfortunately, there are not enough to meet required nurse staffing ratios. Several staffing agencies have been contacted to provide additional support and leadership is planning for contract support by setting up employee health screening, security badging, credentialing verification, etc. Nurse staffing is expected to be reduced by as much as 50% in some units. Many nonessential services and surgeries are being canceled as the walkout scope becomes clear. Inpatients are being assessed for any who may be discharged or transferred. The media have been covering the walkout and are posing many questions regarding the quality and safety of the care provided while staffing is significantly reduced.

Does your Emergency Management Program address the following issues?

Mitigation

1.	Does your hospital address the threat and impact of a staff shortage incident in the annual Hazard Vulnerability Analysis, including the identification of mitigation strategies and tactics?
2.	Does your hospital participate in pre-incident local response planning with public safety officials (e.g., emergency medical services, fire, and law enforcement), local emergency management officials, other area hospitals, regional healthcare coalition coordinators , and other appropriate public and private organizations, including meetings and conference calls to plan and share status?
3.	Does your hospital's Emergency Operations Plan include triggers or criteria for activation of the Emergency Operations Plan and the Hospital Command Center?
4.	Does your hospital have a plan for a staff shortage due to unexpected crises or labor action? Does this include the impact of all representing unions?
5.	Does your hospital have a process to conduct pre-incident planning and prepare for the staff shortage?
6.	Does your hospital have a process to assess the impact of a staff shortage on hospital operations?
7.	Does your hospital have a Business Continuity Plan?

Preparedness

1.	Does your hospital have a Staff Shortage Plan that includes? ☐ Contingency staff utilization and support plans? ☐ A plan to supplement staffing and obtain staffing from outside resources (e.g., registries, other hospitals, out-of-area or state resources, etc.)? ☐ A protocol for revising staffing patterns, scheduling, and assigned duties during the staff shortage? ☐ Established lists of backup or relief staff that can be used to continue patient care? ☐ A plan to assign remaining staff to other duties? ☐ A list of nonessential staff that may be used in alternate roles? ☐ A plan to modify staffing and hours of work? ☐ Plans for alterations in support services to maintain clinical services?
2.	Does your hospital exercise the Staff Shortage Plan annually and revise it as needed?
3.	Does your hospital have procedures to reduce or cancel nonessential inpatient or outpatient services?
4.	Does your hospital have a plan to decrease patient census through early discharges, transfers, and ambulance diversion?
5.	Does your hospital have pre-incident standardized messages for communicating risks and recommendations to the public, patients, staff, and the media regarding the hospital's ability to continue operations?
6.	Does your hospital have a plan for traffic and crowd control that considers picket lines, demonstrations, media attention, while maintaining security of your staff, hospital, and visitors?

7.	Does your hospital have an agreement with other hospitals to provide elective procedures and outpatient services (e.g., dialysis, physical therapy, and clinic visits) in the event of a staff shortage?
8.	Does your hospital have a plan to receive and process healthcare volunteers? Does it require the activation of the Emergency Operations Plan for activation of processing and utilizing volunteers?

Immediate and Intermediate Response

1.	Does your hospital have a policy to monitor the health status and absenteeism of staff during the incident?
2.	Does your hospital have a procedure to address hospital security, including the threat of violence or civil disturbances?
3.	Does your hospital plan have a mechanism to establish a liaison role with local law enforcement, special weapons and tactics (SWAT) team and the Federal Bureau of Investigation?
4.	Does your hospital have a process to assess the impact of modified staffing on patient care services?
5.	Does your hospital have a process for including local emergency management, local health authorities, local emergency medical services, medical mutual aid coordinators, and other hospitals in the response?
6.	Does your hospital have a procedure for providing situation updates and information to local emergency management and area hospitals?
7.	Does your hospital have a plan to manage temporary staff, including: ☐ Credentialing, privileging, and primary source verification? ☐ Identification badges? ☐ Food and housing support, transportation assistance, and medical care if needed? ☐ Orientation to the hospital and assigned areas, including emergency codes, infection control practices and performance evaluation? ☐ Staff security and safety? ☐ Scheduling and hours of work? ☐ Supervision while on duty? ☐ Payroll? ☐ Compliance issues (e.g., The Joint Commission, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services [CMS], Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act [HIPAA])?
8.	Does your hospital have a plan to provide regular information and updates to on duty staff, including: ☐ Staff attendance? ☐ Staff attitude and compliance with hospital policies? ☐ Staff security needs? ☐ Need for information and updates, including rumor control? ☐ Threat of violence or civil disobedience? ☐ Parking and traffic control?
9.	Does your hospital have a plan to establish a media staging area and provide regular updates and briefings with situation status and appropriate patient information?

10.	Does your hospital have a plan to provide regular information and updates to patients and families, including: ☐ Rumor control? ☐ Parking and traffic control? ☐ Scope of services? ☐ Staff availability and competence?
11.	Does your hospital have procedures for outsourcing certain services (e.g., laboratory, environmental services)?
12.	Does your hospital have a plan to establish an alternate loading dock area to accept vendor deliveries if vendors refuse to cross picket lines?

13.	Does your Communications Plan include:
	☐ Rapid notification of local emergency management, other hospitals, local emergency medical services and regional medical resources regarding hospital situation status and to ascertain their situation status?
	☐ Regularly providing information and updates to the media?
	☐ Use of social media for communication, including:
	    o Who can use social media?
	    o Who approves the use of social media?
	    o When is the use of social media not appropriate?
	☐ Procedure for notification of internal and external authorities (local, county, region, state)?

14.	Does your hospital have a plan to address behavioral health support needs and stress management services of patients, staff, and families, including obtaining services from local or regional resources?
15.	Does your hospital have 24/7 access to risk management and legal counsel?

Extended Response and System Recovery

1.	Does your hospital have position depth to support extended operations of the Hospital Incident Management Team?
2.	Does your hospital have a Business Continuity Plan for long term incidents?
3.	Does your hospital have a Demobilization Plan that includes criteria for deactivation of positions, reactivation of services, and the return to normal operations?
4.	Does your hospital have a process for notification of reopening to staff, other hospitals, local emergency management, the local Emergency Operations Center, media, and patients' families?
5.	Does your hospital have procedures for canceling outsourced services?
6.	Does your hospital have a plan for team rebuilding?
7.	Does your hospital have a continuing process to capture all costs and expenditures related to operations?
8.	Does your hospital have procedures to debrief patients, staff, and community partners?

9.	Does your hospital have procedures to collect and collate incident documentation and formulate an After Action Report and Corrective Action and Improvement Plan?