



## PEDIATRIC REUNIFICATION: MODULE 3

Essential Elements of a Hospital Family Reunification Plan – INFORMATION SHARING, SECURITY CONCERNS, AND LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS.

# Family Reunification: Information Sharing, Security Concerns and Legal Considerations



Disasters can be chaotic and stress inducing. Ensuring that all families and staff have clear, concise and regular updates of the incident status as well as the hospital response will not only minimize potential psychological and security concerns but may also assist with legal challenges faced.

This module will discuss the processes and implementations necessary for a successful reunification effort with regards to information sharing, security concerns and legal considerations

This module is the third of 4 modules offered through Region V for Kids and the Pediatric Pandemic Network (PPN) collaborative on successful family reunification for a pediatric disaster.

# INFORMATION SHARING



- Lack of timely information to the public about a disaster can lead to the following:
  - Chaotic circumstances
  - Increased crowds
  - Increased call volume
  - Anxious family members seeking their loved ones
- Hospitals should establish close partnerships with other key response organizations so that all messaging efforts are consistent and coordinated. Examples are:
  - Public health
  - Emergency management
  - Law enforcement
  - American Red Cross

# Considerations for Information Sharing



- Information that can be shared with community representatives ahead of time
- How, and what kinds, of critical information can be shared considering HIPAA and other laws / regulations / policies
- How to rapidly implement communication processes, including pre-scripted messaging
- How the emergency management and public health communities will coordinate their public messaging with hospitals
- How to inform hospital staff regarding what information they can / cannot share
- How best to establish good relationships with local news agencies



# INFORMATION SHARING



- Timely, accurate information to the public after a disaster is paramount.
- Ensure that the hospital gathers and disseminates the best possible internally and externally available, credible, and verified information to families and staff.
- Families should have regular updates of the incident status and the hospital response.
- Much of this coordinated communications should be determined as a part of disaster planning and preparation, whereby interactions with media sources and outlets are verified.
- *“Every comprehensive reunification plan should have procedures that govern the sharing of relevant information with other hospitals, public health agencies, and other partners involved in the response, as legally permitted, to facilitate family reunification.”<sup>1</sup>*

# Information Sharing within Hospitals



- Effectively manage and designate key areas in the hospital where family members can inquire if their loved ones are present in the facility (eg. Information desk, emergency department reception area, hospital operator).
- Information sharing is best coordinated through media support, data entry, collaboration with outside agencies (e.g. social services, law enforcement, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children ) and through internal communications and coordinating centers.
- Ensure that families have regular updates of the incident status and the hospital response.

# INFORMATION SHARING



- Dissemination of credible and verified information to families and staff is key.
- Maintain consistency by ensuring that family members seeking information receive the same correct information whether they present in person or speak with an operator.
- The Family Reunification Branch Director should have a process wherein updates on the lists of patients are distributed to the staff at regular intervals and staff must be notified when to expect the next update.
- Include contact information for available municipal reunification resources to the public to aid families with the reunification process as a whole.

**MAINTAIN  
CONSISTENCY  
WITH  
MESSAGING**



Facilitates an accurate, single unified message to the public



# Designate key areas for information collection and sharing within the hospital



Hospital Family Reunification Center

Patient-Safe Area

Information Desk

Family Reunification Website

Emergency Department

To ensure proper oversight and communication

# INFORMATION SHARING



- **Question:** What if a family member cannot be definitively told that their relative is not present as a hospital patient?
- **Answer:** Direct them to the HFRC to wait, or to other appropriate municipal reunification resources.
  - Hospitals should include detailed contact information for municipal reunification resources (if available) in all their communications to the public.

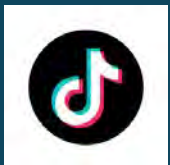
# SOCIAL MEDIA



- Information on social media can be difficult to monitor, impossible to control, not to mention unfounded rumors are rampant.



- Urge patients and family members to refrain from disseminating information concerning children, hospital operations / conditions, or other sensitive information on social media.



- Inform family members to notify staff if they discover inappropriate information concerning HFRC, family members, or children via social media



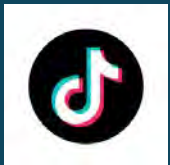
# SOCIAL MEDIA



- Train and instruct hospital staff to inform the Public Information Officer (PIO) of any inaccurate or inappropriate posts on Social media.



- Hospital staff or volunteers should closely monitor the children in their care to ensure that they are not posting pictures or information from the reunification sites within the hospital.



- Coordinate with the hospital PIO to respond to social media reports or inquiries as appropriate.



- Communication templates may help guide both parents and family members in the appropriate sharing of information.





# Any Questions



30 second - 1 minute break for questions on Information Sharing

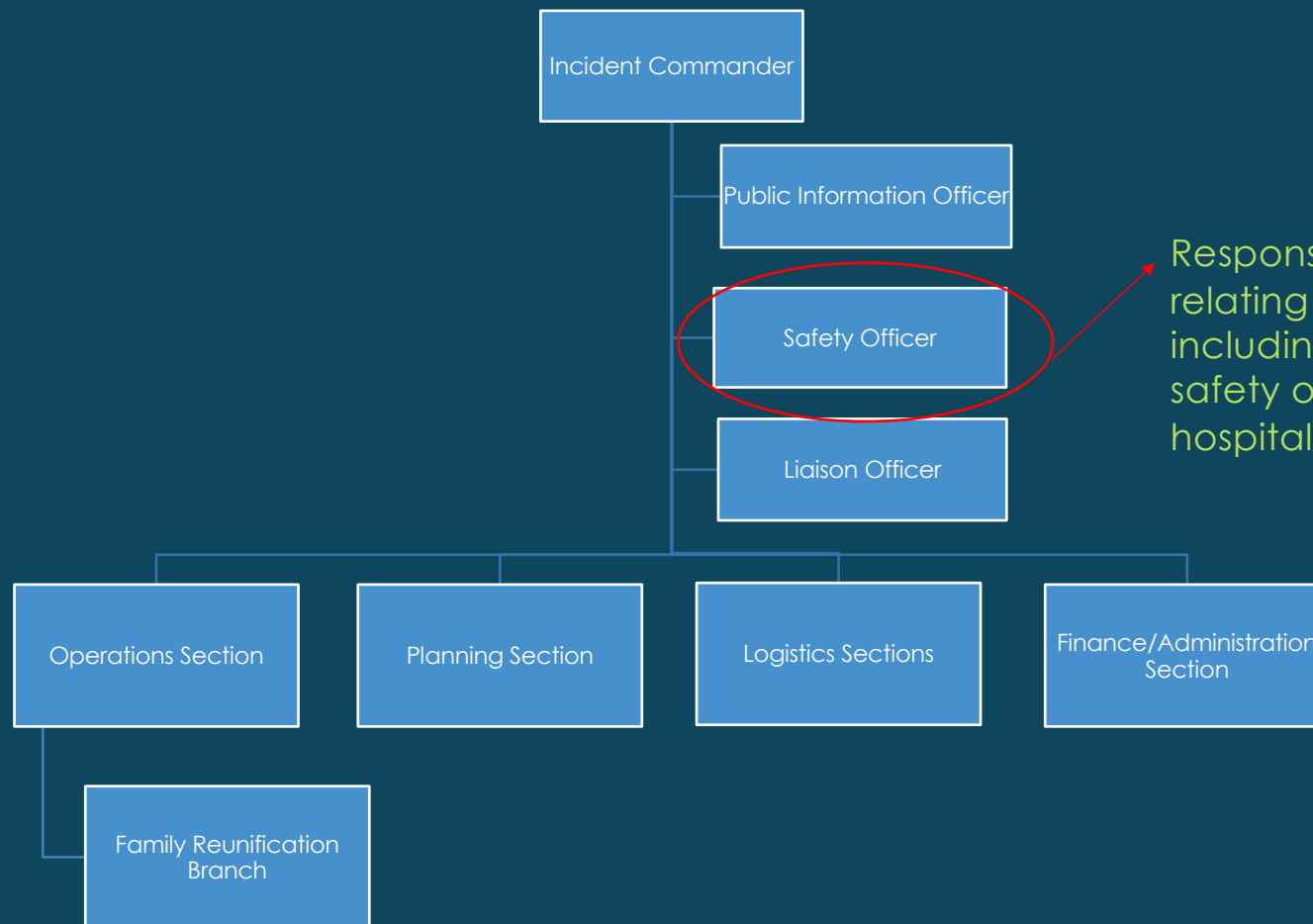
# SECURITY CONCERNS



# SECURITY CONCERNS



- Disasters can be chaotic causing security risks for both patients and healthcare workers therefore **security leadership should be involved early in the planning process.**
- A Safety Officer's role should be established within the Incident Command structure.
- Ensure that there are always security officers present in all the key areas of the hospital, including but not limited to the **Patient Safe Area (PSA), the Emergency Department, Hospital Family Reunification Center (HFRC)** and all the **information desks.**



Responsible for all matters relating to operational safety including the health and safety of patients and hospital personnel



# SECURITY: Roles and Responsibilities



- In addition to providing safety, law enforcement confirms that background checks have been conducted and if available, fingerprints collected for all individuals with access to unaccompanied minors.
- Hospital security personnel can and should work with and serve as an interface with outside law enforcement should additional security be needed.
- Local law enforcement should work with child welfare agencies to ensure that the children are safe and have temporary and supportive care. They are also responsible for working closely with these agencies to investigate if a crime has potentially occurred.
- They coordinate with state law enforcement and National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) on reunification issues.

# Any Questions



30 second - 1 minute break for questions on Security Concerns

# LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS



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Reasons why **Legal Counsel or Risk Management** should be consulted or notified early in the process of a disaster activation

- Children are placed in vulnerable positions, some without a parent or guardian present which puts them at additional risk of harm.
- Plan should include considerations for providing care in the absence of a consenting adult parent or guardian.
- Implement standardized guidance to verify the identity and custody rights of adults seeking the release of the child.
- Ensure that proper legal procedures are always followed and keep the child's safety in mind.



# LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS



## ○ The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996.<sup>2</sup>

- Health care providers can share patient information as necessary to identify, locate, and notify family members, guardians, or anyone else responsible for the individual's care, general condition, or death.
  - The health care provider should get verbal permission from individuals, when possible; but if the individual is incapacitated or not available, providers may share information for these purposes if, in their professional judgment, doing so in the patient's best interest.
  - This means that, when necessary, a hospital may notify the media, law enforcement or the public at large to help locate, identify or otherwise notify family members and others as to the location and general condition of their loved ones.

2. United States Health and Human Services (HHS). "Can Health Care information be shared in a severe Disaster?." Accessed Dec 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023

<https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/faq/960/can-health-care-information-be-shared-in-a-severe-disaster/index.html>

# LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS



- Connect with social services and local law enforcement to see what protocols they follow.
- A health care provider can share information with disaster relief organizations which are authorized by law or by their charters to assist in disaster relief efforts (e.g. the American Red Cross).
  - *Patient permission to share information is therefore not needed if doing so would interfere with the organization's ability to respond to the emergency.*

# Any Questions



30 second - 1 minute break for questions on  
Legal Considerations

OR

Questions to the rest of the Module

# What to look forward too



Module 4: Plan Activation

Module 5: Recovery



# MOC Part 4 Credit



## MOC Part 4 Credit: 25 Points

- Attend or Asynchronously watch Module Education Series
- Complete Post - Reunification Survey
- Submit Draft updated reunification plan OR a list of planned reunification plan changes

# Region V For Kids



## Funding Sources

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- Twitter: @RegionVforKids
- Website: QR Code to Website





# REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

- [National Center for Missing and Exploited Children; Unaccompanied Minor Registry](#)
- [National Center for Disaster Medicine and Public Health: Tracking and Reunification of Children in Disasters: A Lesson and Reference for Health Professionals Education Module](#)
- [Federal Emergency Management Agency: Postdisaster Reunification of Children: A Nationwide Approach](#)
- [Coyote Crisis Collaborative Family Reunification Center Planning Guide, 2017](#)
- [Federal Emergency Management Agency \(FEMA\)](#)
- [American Red Cross](#)
- [American Academy of Pediatrics; Family Reunification following Disasters](#)