

No-Notice Incidents: Family Assistance

April 2018

ASPR TRACIE Tip Sheets: No-Notice Incidents

ASPR TRACIE has developed a series of tip sheets for hospitals and other healthcare facilities planning for no-notice incident response. Our traditional concepts and approaches have not kept pace with real-world incidents in the U.S. and other countries or the challenges the healthcare system faces in managing the resulting extraordinarily large number of casualties. The tip sheets are based on discussions ASPR NHPP and ASPR TRACIE had with healthcare personnel who were involved in the October 2017 mass shooting response in Las Vegas and supplemented with information from other recent no-notice incidents. While there is great variance in the scope and healthcare needs resulting from no-notice incidents, these tip sheets focus on some of the identified challenges.

Family Assistance

- Expect loved ones to show up looking for patients, even if those patients are not being cared for by your facility. One Las Vegas hospital had more than 500 family members arrive.
- Designate a location away from your treatment space for loved ones to wait for information.
- Establish a process even if there is no information to give.
 - Create lists to track patients. One hospital discovered that multiple staff members had started their own lists and found that managing two lists – a master list of patients and an evolving list to match patients with families – helped to reduce confusion and manage the identification and communication processes.
 - Collect identifying information from loved ones to include in your lists. Other hospitals have found body art, piercings, and photos (especially from the day of the incident) helpful in identifying patients.
 - Provide regular updates, even if the update is that there is no update.
 - Provide patient status information on a case-by-case basis in a room separate from the waiting location.
 - Follow the same process for everyone.
- Prepare for consulates inquiring about international patients.
- Include staff with fluency in languages other than English or ensure interpreter services are available.
- Ensure that telephone support is included in your hospital's surge planning.
 - Hospitals experience an extreme increase in call volume in the aftermath of a no-notice incident as callers seek to locate their loved ones. Make sure that all publicized phone lines are staffed 24/7 with personnel who have access to scripts that are continually updated as additional information becomes known.
 - Not all loved ones will be able to get to your facility quickly, but they will seek updates on the status of patients you are caring for. Be sure that providers are available and prepared to respond to inquiries via telephone in a timely manner.

The family assistance telephone information line established following the Las Vegas no-notice incident was overwhelmed and went down for 2 hours.

After the shooting at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando (FL), Orlando Health published [guidance on managing non-resident/ foreign citizen patients](#).

Loved ones awaiting information were directed to the auditorium at Sunrise Hospital and Medical Center and the cafeteria at University Medical Center.

- Follow Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) guidelines on the sharing of confidential patient information. However, HIPAA should not impede your hospital’s ability to share necessary information (including directory information such as name, age, and condition) with other healthcare facilities, your jurisdiction’s family assistance center (FAC), emergency management officials, or other partners in support of the incident response.
- There may be some delay in the establishment of the jurisdiction’s FAC and information line for loved ones. You should be prepared to handle inquiries until these services are set up and to refer callers to these resources, as appropriate, once they are established.
- Provide on-site mental health support through your behavioral health, social work, pastoral care, and case management staff.
 - Loved ones who were at the incident scene will be dealing with their own psychological trauma.
 - People will experience a range of emotions (e.g., anxiety, grief, anger), especially during the early phase of the response when minimal information is available.
 - Providing patient status information in a separate room can help you provide loved ones with more customized emotional support as needed.
- Minimize ongoing traumatization of family members, many of whom may arrive with torn and bloodied clothing, no shoes, and separated from their belongings. Consider providing:
 - Baby wipes, other toiletries, and access to bathrooms to freshen up
 - Scrubs to replace clothing
 - Blankets and pillows
 - Water and light snacks (as available)
 - Cell phone chargers to allow loved ones to maintain contact
 - Telephone access
 - Computer/wifi access (e.g., to allow access to on-line “Safe and Well” or other services)
- Plan for longer-term family and patient assistance. Particularly when an incident occurs in a tourist location or at a special event, many patients and loved ones may be from out of town.
 - Link loved ones to your jurisdiction’s FAC as soon as possible.
 - Anticipate the need to coordinate the transfer of some patients to healthcare facilities closer to their homes in the days and weeks following the incident.

Related ASPR TRACIE Resources

Tip Sheets in This Series:

[Community Response and Media Management](#)
[Expanding Traditional Roles to Address Patient Surge](#)
[Fatality Management](#)
[Hospital Triage, Intake, and Throughput](#)
[Non-Trauma Hospital Considerations](#)
[Trauma Surgery Adaptations and Lessons](#)
[Trauma System Considerations](#)

Other Resources:

[Healthcare Response to a No-Notice Incident: Las Vegas \(Webinar\)](#)
[Family Reunification and Support, Fatality Management, and Mental/Behavioral Health \(Non-Responders\) Topic Collections](#)
[ASPR TRACIE’s Select Mass Violence Resources Page](#)
[ASPR TRACIE’s Select Disaster Behavioral Health Resources Page](#)
[HIPAA and Disasters: What Emergency Professionals Need to Know](#)
[The Exchange Issue 3: Preparing for and Responding to No-Notice Events](#)

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