

# Internal Is Also External

## *Aligning Crisis Communications for Employees, Stakeholders and Media Across a Multi-hospital Health System*

**Heather Cunningham, Director, Internal Communications, Northwestern Medicine**

**Chris King, Director, Media Relations, Northwestern Medicine**



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# Agenda

- **Review:** Two crisis situations that occurred in Northwestern Medicine hospitals
- **Group Discussion:** Would your organization be ready today to manage these types of crisis situations?
- **Sharing:** How Northwestern Medicine coordinated internal, physician, consumer and media relations communications
- **Learnings:** Takeaways that apply to both local and system employee and physician audiences

# Learning Objectives

- **Learning Objective 1:** Apply techniques for sharing a single crisis communications message across internal/external audiences and multi-hospital geographic regions
- **Learning Objective 2:** The value of developing one internal/external communications staffing model and important roles/responsibilities for each team
- **Learning Objective 3:** Identify the types of follow-up communications important to share after key crisis events

# About Northwestern Medicine



*Where the Patient Comes First*

200+ Locations including 10 Hospitals	NMH No. 1 in Chicago & IL U.S. News & World Report
More than 33,000 clinical and administrative staff	NMH No. 10 Nationally U.S. News & World Report
4,200 Medical Staff	12 Specialties Ranked in NIH Top 10

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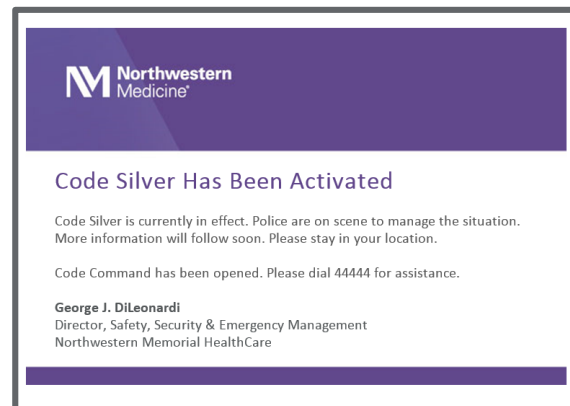
 Northwestern  
Medicine

# Issue vs. Crisis

# When an Issue Becomes a Crisis...

## May 13, 2017 – Armed patient takes nurse hostage

- Hospital patient from county jail grabs gun from county sheriff guarding him
- Sheriff runs from room, and prisoner with gun begins roaming hospital trying to exit
- Prisoner begins interaction with staff
- Code Silver called
- Hostage stand-off begins



# What if This Crisis Happened at Your Organization?

## Small group discussion

- What audiences would need to be alerted? If you are part of a system, which messages would be local and which would be system-wide?
- What communications channels would you use?
- What would be your biggest communications challenges?
- How would current internal communications and media relations teams in place divide responsibilities and work together?
- Are you ready to manage an event like this today?



# Crisis Event Underway

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NEWS CRIME HEALTH

# Delnor Hospital hostage standoff ends with inmate shot to death

By Luke Wilusz and Sam Charles | May 14, 2017, 1:54am CDT

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## Inmate Fatally Shot After Taking Delnor Hospital Employees Hostage

Published May 13, 2017 at 2:41 PM | Updated at 6:59 PM CDT on May 14, 2017





**HOSPITAL STANDOFF**


10:00 66°NBC 5

 @NBCCHICAGO

An inmate was fatally shot after taking two hostages at Delnor Hospital in suburban Geneva on Saturday, according to police. NBC 5's Chris Hush reports. (Published Sunday, May 14, 2017)

**TRENDING STORIES**


- Why There Are More Lightning Bugs in the Chicago Area
- VIDEO Festival Gunman ID'd; Had Referred to Neo-Nazi Manifesto
- VIDEO See It: Gator Robb Nearly Unrecognizable Without His Beard
- VIDEO Safety the Top Priority at Lollapalooza, City Says

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## Gunman Holds Geneva Hospital Staff Hostage

By Audrina Bigos May 13, 2017 at 2:35 pm Filed Under: Bob Roberts, Delnor Hospital, Geneva, Hostage Situation, Tyson Sellers



Audrina Bigos @AudrinaBigos

BREAKING: Officers with rifles and SWAT outside of Geneva hospital that's on lockdown. Reports of hostage situation inside. @cbschicago



8 3:13 PM - May 13, 2017 · Hillside, IL





# The Aftermath



## Code Silver Has Been Cleared at Delnor

The Code Silver has been cleared at Northwestern Medicine Delnor Hospital as the situation is no longer active. The employees who were involved in the situation are safe. However, the Emergency Department is currently inaccessible and on bypass.

THIS MESSAGE IS BEING SENT TO ALL NORTHWESTERN MEDICINE EMPLOYEES AND PHYSICIANS



From Dean M. Harrison  
President and Chief Executive Officer, Northwestern Memorial HealthCare

## Delnor Incident

Colleagues,



Northwestern Medicine

May 13, 2017 ·

Like Page



We are thankful for local law enforcement's assistance today. The employees who were involved in the situation at Delnor Hospital are now safe. Members of our Human Resources and Employee Assistance Program are on-site and providing support to employees.

At this time, the hospital is returning to normal operations.

1.2K

26 Comments 92 Shares

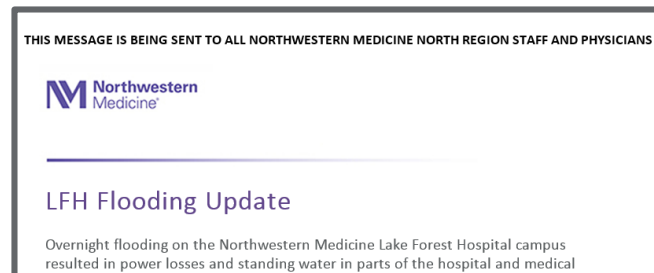
# Learnings From a System Perspective

Local	System
Local employees and physicians need frequent updates during the crisis period and aftermath	If a local event is expected to garner widespread news coverage, all system employees and physicians should know about it first
Internal communications should be prepared for anniversary dates of the event	System employees will want to know how they can help staff in other locations
Expect media relations sentiment scores to decrease, based on event coverage	The event will spark planning and education at other locations, which will require communications support

# When an Issue Becomes a Crisis...

## July 12, 2017 – Hospital flooding leads to evacuation

- What started as a summer rain quickly turned into a national weather event
- Five to eight inches of rain fell in areas of Lake County, leading to flooding, road closures and residents being asked to move to higher ground
- Within hours, weather officials called the flooding “an extremely dangerous and life-threatening situation”
- Wind and rain knocked out the Lake Forest Hospital main generator



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# Crisis Event Underway

**Northwestern Medicine**  
July 12, 2017 · 🌐

Visit our website to learn more. If you have questions about appointments or services available, please call your medical provider's office.

**Northwestern Medicine**

NM.ORG

**Flooding Impacts NM Lake Forest Hospital Campus**  
Overnight flooding on the Northwestern Medicine Lake Forest Hospital...



## LFH Flooding Update

Overnight flooding on the Northwestern Medicine Lake Forest Hospital campus resulted in power losses and standing water in parts of the hospital and medical office buildings, as well as other buildings on campus. The hospital is operating



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WEATHER  
**Chicago Weather: Flooding, power outage force evacuation of Northwestern Lake Forest Hospital**

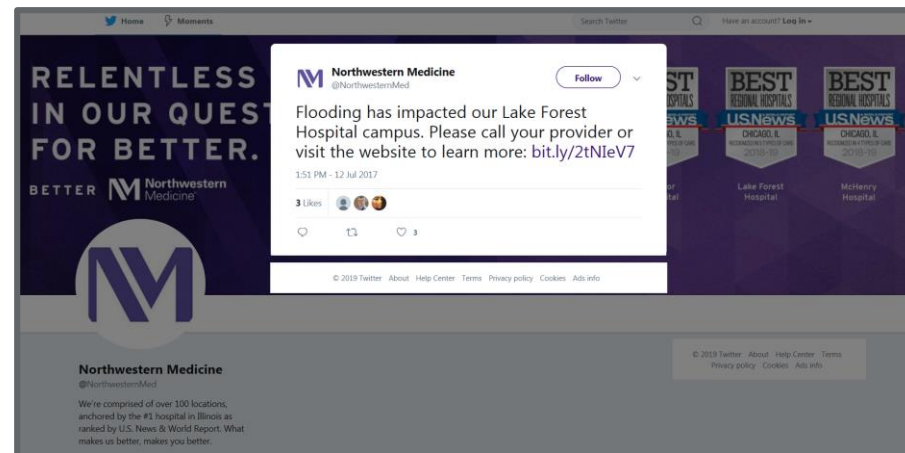
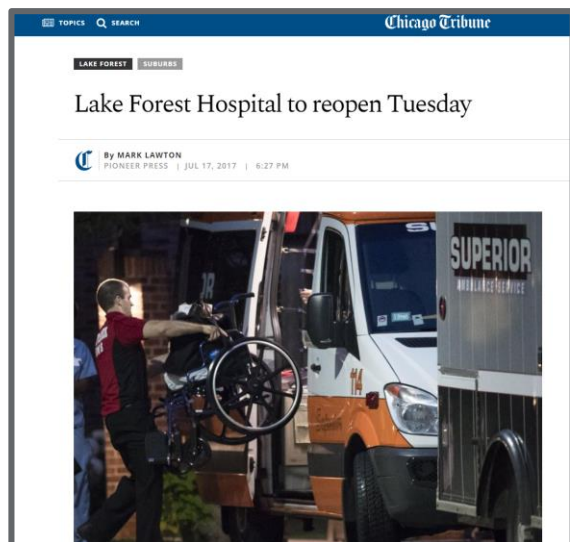
**BREAKING NEWS**  
**Hospital Evacuated**  
  
TONIGHT 72° 49° MORE STORMS DEVELOP  
10:04 78° abc 7  
Patients at Northwestern Lake Forest Hospital had to be transferred after a power outage Wednesday afternoon.

# The Aftermath



## LFH Approved For Tuesday Reopening

I am pleased to report that Northwestern Medicine Lake Forest Hospital will reopen at 5 am Tuesday, July 18. All staff should report for their shifts as scheduled.





# Learnings From a System Perspective

Local	System
Prepare for how you will communicate if traditional channels are unavailable	Use this as an opportunity to celebrate collaboration and teamwork
Make sure you have a seat at the executive leadership table	Utilize system team members to support local staff when events are extended and around-the-clock
Get ample photography and video you can use to spotlight local staff for ongoing internal communications	System employees will benefit from a recap communication at annual Town Hall meetings or other events

# Three Key Takeaways

1. Advocate for timely and transparent communication to employees, physicians and the media
2. Don't hesitate to over-communicate, and don't assume everyone knows what is going on
3. Coordinate efforts with supporting teams and leadership
  - Internal/Physician/Consumer Communications
  - Media Relations
  - Social Media
  - Security
  - Legal
  - Executive Leadership

# Questions?

**Please be sure to complete the session evaluation on the mobile app!**

# Heather Cunningham

## Northwestern Medicine



- 25+ years of healthcare communications experience with both national and Chicago-area healthcare organizations
- Unique expertise leading healthcare organizations through change, including 10 hospital integrations over her career
- Leads 15-person team with sub-groups devoted to internal, physician and consumer audiences

**Director, Internal Communications**

# Chris King

## Northwestern Medicine



**Director, Media Relations**

- 20+ years of media relations experience
- Gained experience in agency and corporate settings
- Handles all system issues and crisis communications
- Leads 8-person media relations team; provides oversight for all Northwestern Medicine communications efforts