



DELAWARE VALLEY HEALTHCARE COUNCIL  
*of The Hospital & Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania*

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**Delaware Valley Health Care Disaster Preparedness Task Force  
Media Protocols During a Declared Emergency**

The goal of this Media Protocols document is to establish an agreed upon framework that hospitals will implement during a declared emergency, with guidance on how to delegate media inquiries to those government officials responsible for managing the event. Obviously this document does not cover all situations before, during, or after declared emergencies, but it provides a set of guidelines that emphasize the importance of a unified media message that is developed by working closely with public relations officials for emergency preparedness agencies and disseminated by health care organizations.

**Media Protocols During a Declared Emergency**

This policy and procedure is to be implemented among hospitals and healthcare institutions in the Delaware Valley in the event the Federal, State or local government declares an emergency.

In terms of educating the public on the nature of the emergency, the first priority for public relations representatives of healthcare institutions is to coordinate with appropriate government officials in managing the emergency while supporting our respective facilities.

Hospitals and health systems agree to focus their communications efforts during a declared emergency on supporting the government agencies designated as the central point of information dissemination, the single informational source, and sole spokesperson to the media and public. Hospital and health systems' public relations officials will defer to appropriate government public relations officials to provide regular updates and action recommendations. This assures continuity and consistency of messages, portrays a unified emergency response, and will provide important fact-based information to foster public confidence. It is recommended that this policy be incorporated into institutional disaster plans to be implemented by hospital incident command centers in the event of an emergency.

Upon notification of a declared emergency, hospital public relations representatives will work closely with the Delaware Valley Healthcare Council (DVHC), which will be prepared to help coordinate the exchange of information with government and the media. Hospital public relations officials are urged to take the following immediate actions:

- Activate existing internal emergency protocols, inform institutional senior management, security, and emergency departments that the Federal, State or local government has declared an emergency condition. DVHC will provide any detail of the emergency conditions, as known.

- Distribute a communication via email, fax, or other means to all institutional personnel that media queries should be directed to the hospital or health system public relations office and caution them that they may be approached by media as they arrive or depart from their shifts.
- Direct media who contact the institution by telephone or arrive unannounced at the facility to the joint public information center or other location established by the responsible government agency or an offsite interview location, away from patient care areas or waiting rooms.
- Consideration of a hospital or health system's offsite interview location should be given in advance of an emergency.
- Advise security that no television interviews will be provided from the facility, so that they may redirect media arriving there to another location away from the emergency department and off of institutional grounds.
- In response to requests, make available to government agencies and officials those experts who can provide commentary about the medical impact of emergency situations.
- In the event an institutional representative is the agency-appointed medical expert, establish an interview staging area away from the emergency department or other patient care areas.
- Counsel security and hospital switchboards that any calls from news media should be directed to the public relations office during business hours and to the on-call public relations person after hours.

### **Sensitive Issues But Emergency Not Declared**

During a heightened alert status recommended by the U.S. government, there may be occasions when sensitive conditions exist, but no formal declaration of emergency has been made. These conditions may result in heightened media attention toward medical institutions in general or toward a specific hospital. In this event, the public relations representative should take the following actions:

- Alert DVHC that a sensitive condition exists at their institution. DVHC will be available to alert other member institutions and appropriate Federal, State or local agencies of the condition.
- DVHC will help facilitate both coordination and cooperation with government authorities, as well as help guide message strategy in responding to media inquiries.
- Distribute a communication via email to all institutional personnel that media queries should be directed to your public relations office and caution them that they may be approached by media as they arrive or depart from their shifts.
- Counsel security and hospital switchboards that any calls from news media should be directed to the public relations office during business hours and to the on-call public relations person after hours.

*This Media Protocol was developed by the Public Relations Work Group, reviewed by public relations directors for all member hospitals and health systems, and subsequently approved by the full Delaware Valley Health Care Disaster Preparedness Task Force. For further information, please contact Priscilla Koutsouradis, Communications Director, 215-575-3743.*