



EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS



Emergency Preparedness

Emergency preparedness is crucial for a hospital's resilience and is vital for risk management. Emergency and disaster preparedness is a substantial undertaking for hospital leadership. Hospitals must be prepared for anything from cyber-attacks to natural disasters or man-made incidents. Organizations such as The Joint Commission or state agencies provide robust frameworks to assist hospitals and health care systems with these efforts. While the board may not be directly involved in an emergency response, they should have a broad understanding of their role and how they can best support their organization.



Planning

The board is not responsible for drafting or implementing an organization's emergency preparedness plans. However, they should ensure plans are in place for various scenarios and are regularly reviewed and updated by the hospital's leadership.



Education and Training

It's essential to ensure that staff members are adequately trained in emergency response procedures and protocols to be prepared for any situation; from the board's perspective, this involves allocating funds for training in the budget. The board may not be directly involved with training, simulations or drills but should ensure they were conducted.



Resource Allocation

The board should make sure an adequate budget is in place for emergency supplies, equipment, and training to effectively support emergency preparedness efforts. Additionally, funding for infrastructure upgrades should be carefully reviewed and approved to strengthen overall emergency response capabilities and ensure readiness in critical situations.



Communication

Establishing clear communication channels for emergency response, including with local emergency management agencies, is crucial for effective coordination during a crisis. Board members may help initiate or foster this relationship, but it is up to the hospital's CEO to maintain and utilize these channels. Unless specifically requested by the hospital's CEO, board members must not attempt to communicate on behalf of the hospital in an emergency situation. Board members need step aside to allow the hospital management to streamline communication with necessary stakeholders. It is also critically important that trustees uphold their duty of loyalty in these instances and not share confidential information.

Some incidents may warrant the board chair to speak out or to use board members as advocates for the hospital. The board and CEO should develop internal talking points that are closely followed in such cases.



Risk Assessment

It is essential to oversee the process of identifying and assessing potential risks the hospital may face during various emergencies. By discussing and understanding these vulnerabilities, mitigation strategies and resources can be prioritized to reduce the impact of potential disasters and ensure the hospital remains as prepared and resilient as possible.



Learning and Improvement

Analyzing the hospital's response to past emergencies is critical for identifying areas that need improvement and integrating lessons learned into emergency plans. While hospital management is responsible for establishing the strategy for emergency preparedness and the day-to-day implementation, the board should be aware of significant changes to a hospital's emergency response and discuss if areas can be improved through additional resources or training.



Moving Forward

You never know when disaster will strike, so it is imperative to start planning today. Board members must be aware of emergency preparedness as part of their fiduciary duty to the organization. By understanding the importance of emergency preparedness, they can make informed decisions that prioritize patient care, staff safety, and operational continuity. Board members must ensure they support but do not get in the way when an event occurs in their facility. However, the board sets the tone for a proactive approach, ensuring that resources are allocated effectively, risks are mitigated, and plans are in place.

A well-prepared hospital safeguards lives and strengthens its reputation and trust within the community. Ultimately, a board's commitment to emergency preparedness is critical to the hospital's ability to navigate crises and emerge stronger.