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# GOOD STORY

## St. Louis Children's Hospital's Mobile Health Unit Participates in Emergency Planning

### SUMMARY

Saint Louis Children's Hospital (SLCH) integrated its mobile pediatric health units, the Healthy Kids Express (HKE), into emergency preparedness planning and drills. By parking the HKE outside the emergency room (ER) during mass casualty incidents (MCI) and relocating some emergency care functions to the program's two vans, SLCH will reduce congestion in the ER. Four potential uses for the HKE have been discussed: triage, chemical decontamination, vaccination for SLCH employees, and vaccination for the general public. All of these emergency services could be delivered as effectively by the HKE as by the SLCH emergency room. The vans have participated in one emergency response drill, and will continue to play a role in SLCH's emergency preparedness efforts.

### BACKGROUND

Since 2000, the HKE has been the centerpiece of SLCH's efforts to provide care to underserved communities. The program's vans provide health screenings and vaccinations to 8,000 children a year. The vans are equipped with computers, syringes, vaccines, refrigerators, basic laboratory equipment, and running water. The HKE has proven to be such a valuable asset to SLCH during normal operation that the hospital decided to integrate the vans into its emergency preparedness plan.

### GOALS

During a mass casualty incident (MCI), traffic through ERs is often severely congested. SLCH's goal was to identify health care services that could be delivered outside of the ER, and involve the HKE in emergency planning so that it can deliver those services during a crisis.

### DESCRIPTION

The hospital began by including the HKE manager, Kathleen Sudano, in emergency planning meetings. During these meetings, the hospital community discussed ways in which the vans could be used. Sudano shared her knowledge of the HKE's capacity and limitations and provided feedback on the feasibility of various suggested uses for the vans. The participation of a staffer from the HKE proved to be invaluable. Sudano brought practical operational information to the table, such as the number of available generator hours based on fuel stores.

SLCH identified four possible health care services that could be relocated to the HKE during a MCI: triage, chemical decontamination, and vaccination of employees and the public.

- **Triage:** Relocating triage to the HKE would assist in reducing traffic in the emergency room. The HKE has five full-time and five part-time staff members who could provide treatment to patients who were triaged as green (walking wounded). This would allow the ER to devote its time and resources to more severe cases.
- **Chemical decontamination:** The vans are equipped with running water, and SLCH can easily bring portable showers in to decontaminate patients. This would assist in protecting the ER and its patients from exposure to chemical agents.
- **Vaccinations for SLCH employees:** Dedicating the HKE to providing vaccinations to employees and their families will help to ensure that employees receive the prophylactic care they need to work in a hospital environment without putting themselves at risk. By providing a vaccination location immediately outside the emergency room, SLCH will save its employees the hassle of going to public health facilities without diverting hospital staff to the task of administering shots.
- **Vaccination for the public:** The HKE gives St. Louis children thousands of vaccinations a year, so its staff is well trained and its facilities are well equipped for the task. Public health officials and SLCH have discussed using the HKE to distribute vaccinations or dispense medication. SLCH's first priority during a biological incident, however, will be to ensure that its employees and their dependants have access to vaccines and medication.

In the fall of 2003, the HKE participated in SLCH's semi-annual emergency preparedness drill for the first time. SLCH's primary goals during this initial collaboration were:

- To successfully notify the HKE of the MCI,
- To receive a response from the HKE at command central,
- To determine a source of potential external power, and
- To establish refueling requirements.

All four of these goals were met. During the drill, the HKE was stationed outside of the ambulance bay, and could have been used to either triage non-acute victims or assist in evaluation of the medical status of decontamination team members. The HKE participated successfully in the drill, and the vans will continue to play a role in SLCH's emergency preparedness efforts.

## **REQUIREMENTS**

### ***Key to Success***

Giving the staff of the mobile health unit a seat at the table during the planning process was essential. The manager of the HKE was able to raise technical and operational concerns that could easily have been overlooked.

### ***Resources***

Integrating the HKE into the SLCH emergency plan required very few resources other than the time of hospital and mobile health unit staffers. The HKE staff is careful not to spend an excessive amount of time participating in SLCH emergency planning, because they do not want to be unnecessarily diverted from their mission of service to St. Louis's children.

### **Training**

If a mobile health unit is to become a part of a hospital's emergency response plan, its staff should participate in the hospital's drills and exercises.

### **Links**

- Health Kids' Express Virtual Tour: <http://tinyurl.com/ywg7h>
- St. Louis Children's Hospital: <http://www.stlouischildrens.org/>

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