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**Ensuring Resilient Healthcare Organizations: Combining Emergency
Management with Business Continuity**

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**“While no plan can guarantee success, inadequate plans are
proven contributors to failure.”**

Introduction to Business Continuity Planning

The term “business continuity” is widely used and it has taken on a variety of meanings. Most frequently, the term is used in conjunction with the need for adequate disaster recovery, data backup, and emergency mode operations. Business continuity can also be interpreted as a broader organizational process. The American Society for Industrial Security (ASIS) defines business continuity as “...a series of interrelated processes and activities that will assist in creating, testing, and maintaining an organization-wide plan for use in the event of a crisis that threatens the viability and continuity of the organization.” Business continuity planning (BCP) is the consideration of the factors and steps necessary to prepare for a crisis so that the organization can manage and survive the crisis and ensure its continued viability. Where disaster preparedness puts the priority on preparing for what seems unlikely to occur, business continuity puts the priority on the organization’s ability to function at a sustainable and viable level in spite of an emergency or disaster. Business continuity aims to protect a commercial entity.

Business continuity is a comprehensive managed effort that allows organizations to consider the factors and steps necessary to accurately assess risks, prepare for a crisis (disaster or emergency), manage and survive the crisis, take all appropriate actions to ensure the

organization’s continued viability, and secure assets. Business continuity planning (BCP) is not a static process, but like emergency management it represents a continuum of activities. Business continuity has five (5) major elements; readiness, prevention, response, recovery, and testing/training/ evaluation/maintenance.

Business continuity readiness embodies the foundational steps necessary for a successful business continuity plan. These foundational steps include senior level organizational sponsorship and support, performance of a risk assessment, performance of a business impact analysis, development of strategic plans to mitigate risks and to respond to any crisis, and the development of crisis management and response teams.

Business continuity prevention focuses on those areas where planning will allow an organization to avoid or limit the impact of a crisis. Typical prevention elements include the development and implementation of mitigation strategies. Effective mitigation strategies include the identification of actions that can be taken to prevent or limit the impact of a crisis, such as a technology disaster recovery program to mitigate the loss of key documents and data, but also to identify and provide resources needed for mitigation. This can include essential personnel, technology, and facilities, as well as resources such as external vendors, alternate worksites, and emergency response equipment.

Business continuity response is the timely execution of the steps required to respond to a crisis. A business continuity response could be triggered by a catastrophic event, but unlike a response in emergency management, a business continuity response could also be triggered by a variety of other factors, such as legislative changes, changes to the competitive environment, changes in cash flow, or hostile labor negotiations. The response triggers can vary significantly from organization to organization and are directly related to the risks and priorities identified by the risk assessment and BIA. Business continuity response steps are very similar to those in emergency management and include recognition of a potential crisis, notification of team, situational assessment, declaration of a crisis, execution of response plan, effective communication of information to internal and external audiences, and resource management.

Business continuity recovery is similar to the recovery phase of emergency preparedness; it is the assessment of damage or impact of the crisis on the organization, the resumption of critical and remaining processes, and the eventual return to normal operations. In the event of a natural or man-made disaster, a business continuity damage assessment would be identical to that seen in emergency management, but not all crises involve physical damage. Crises, such as technology or societal issues, can impact business operations without resulting in physical damage. Effectively assessing and documenting the damage resulting from a crisis is critical to mobilize the resources necessary to effect recovery. Once damage is assessed, business continuity prioritizes the restoration of critical business processes. The end result of the recovery phase is to bring the organization "back to normal". The American Society for Industrial Security (ASIS) points out that a "new normal" may exist following the crisis that is different from the pre-crisis "normal", but the establishment of the "new normal" state is important in that it helps the organization phase back into productive work.

Business continuity testing/ training/ evaluation/ maintenance consists of the training and education of team members and organization employees in the execution of business continuity operations, the testing of established business continuity plans and the evaluation of their effectiveness on an on-going basis. This consists of the use of drills and exercises to test management and response teams and the evaluation and modification of plans where improvements can be made. Consistent re-evaluation of an organization's business continuity plan is an important element of this phase since the plan can be impacted by a number of different variables, including industry trends, regulatory requirements, newly emerging risks, and event or crisis experience.

Integration of business continuity and emergency preparedness principles in healthcare

The basic elements of emergency management are referred to as the "disciplines of emergency management." Conceptually these emergency management "disciplines" are very similar to the basic elements of business continuity.

The implementation of a business continuity process bears many similarities to established emergency management processes. Both have been motivated, at least in part, by the events of September 11, 2001 and of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Both are intended to help an organization prepare for, respond to, and recover from a crisis or disastrous event. Both utilize an on-going process of risk analysis, preparation, response, recovery, and risk mitigation. The major difference between emergency management and business continuity is their focus. While the focus of emergency management is specifically on natural and man-made disasters, business continuity takes a broader view of what might constitute a "disaster", and takes into account events that could negatively impact an organization's ability to remain financially viable and their fundamental credibility in the marketplace.

Because the current political climate results in a lack of attention being paid to mitigation and long-term recovery, and that they only become priorities as a result of some major catastrophic event, it is time to "take a fresh look" at emergency management. What is needed in emergency management is an overhaul of the current federal management system, where the emergency management disciplines of mitigation and long-term recovery are separated from those of preparedness and response. The entire culture of emergency management needs to adopt a more holistic focus that balances the long-term benefits of mitigation with the short term necessities of preparedness and response.

An objective review of the performance of emergency management mechanisms in the wake of major events supports this position. Federal-level programs are in need of creative changes that permit both a more effective response, but also prioritize long-term mitigation and are better able to support long-term recovery. However, the challenge is greater than simply overhauling the federal administration of emergency management. These new approaches must be utilized by all organizations involved in emergency management, including state and local governments, as well as private sector and non-governmental agencies such as hospitals.

Facts that continue to emerge from post-Katrina New Orleans demonstrate the need for different and more holistic approaches to emergency management. There seems to be a common myth that emergency management is used only to prepare for events that seem unlikely to occur. One constructive approach is to combine the individual efforts by both the public and the private sector to create a longer continuum of emergency management planning. The integration of business continuity concepts with those of emergency management offers an iterative step in this direction.

Private and non-governmental agencies face the same shifting priorities and funding difficulties experienced by governmental agencies. Hospitals and other healthcare providers are no exception. As long as emergency management is viewed as not contributing to the financial viability of the organization, it will remain at best a secondary function, and at worst, it will be viewed as an unfunded government mandate. By integrating the concepts of business continuity with emergency management, the focus of the effort is broadened. Rather than focusing effort on preparing for what seem like unlikely events, efforts are broadened to encompass everyday business drivers. Business continuity planning encompasses a broader definition of crisis, including events that occur with greater frequency and with some degree of predictability. Major storms and earthquakes are relatively rare and are completely unpredictable, which makes the effort of preparation for, and recovery from them harder to justify, let alone sustain. Broaden the focus to include labor negotiations, legislative or regulatory changes, civil instability, and competitive or supply environment changes and suddenly the value of the having mechanisms in place capable of dealing with these issues represents good business.

The broader focus of business continuity makes it practical to integrate emergency management concepts into everyday business operations. The more broadly they are integrated, the more frequently they are used. With greater use, comes greater acceptance and understanding of their application by a greater proportion of the organization's employees. Greater use also brings more feedback that helps improve the process, making it more relevant and increasing its usefulness to the organization. Effective

integration of business continuity and emergency management concepts breeds a culture of preparedness and organizational learning, communication and memory.

In the healthcare industry, this represents a change from established practices. Hospital preparedness is mandated to conform to specific standards. Changing this approach requires the education of hospital leadership to both the value of business continuity planning and in creatively applying business continuity and emergency management processes in ways that demonstrate value to the organization.

CONCLUSION

Emergency management, even when mandated by regulatory agencies, does not by itself provide a compelling motivation for its broad and general application. In order for this to happen, emergency management must be able to show real world value for the organization. The integration of business continuity concepts helps broaden the applicability and increases both the real and potential value of such programs. While it is certainly not a perfect solution, it is an iterative step in the development and implementation of improved "disaster resiliency".

**More information on the ECEM program can be found online at <http://urbanaffairs.unlv.edu/pubadmin>
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