

Communications Exercise Report

OUTLINE

This report is produced by the Emergency Planning team for Salisbury Hospital NHS Foundation Trust to detail the process of a cascade from a Major Incident alert which was submitted by the Emergency Planning team into the Trust switchboard to test the escalation to specific recipients.

This exercise is to support the assurance and governance process laid down in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 where all NHS organisations must conduct communications exercise every six months.

The exercise is designed to test the process and not an individual and is aimed at capturing learning. A planning team made up of the Emergency Planning team and the switchboard manager agreed the method and agreement was sort from the Deputy Chief Operating Officer to conduct this exercise, which was.

METHOD

On Tuesday 13th June at 2pm Head of Emergency Planning for the organisation contacted the Trusts switchboard via a specific telephone number which is a “hot line” for Emergency partners to advice of a Major Incident and advised the call handler that an exercise call was taking place. This is done using the following words:

“Exercise, Exercise, Exercise, this is an Exercise. Please cascade that this is an exercise message and those receiving this message, do not need to continue the cascade. This is an Exercise”

The Head of Emergency Planning also advised the call handler that if they received a call back from the Chief Operating Officer, the Deputy Chief Operating Officer, or the Clinical Site team, they are to then cascade this information to the Emergency Department and the Facilities team.

To ensure the message was delivered correctly a member of the Trusts Emergency Planning team were based in switchboard.

REPSONSE

The exercise started at 2pm on Tuesday 13th June and the call handler took the details supplied by the Head of Emergency Planning and looked up what next to do from the i-response pack. The agreed cascade was that the Clinical Site team are informed who then contact the Chief Operating Officer (COO) and the Deputy Chief Operating Officer (DCOO) to discuss the response and decide if a full cascade or specific departments are informed, depending on the incident however, in the exercise switchboard did not inform the Clinical Site Team and only contacted the COO and DCOO.

Switchboard did cascade the message to the Emergency Department and the Facilities team.

The above cascade is for an alert in core hours as outside of these hours, the Clinical Site team would contact the Duty Manager On-call, who would then contact the Duty Executive On-call.

It is noted that at the time of the alert, the switchboard team were dealing with many enquiries at the front desk regarding new car park arrangements and normal genal issues from the public. There was also a crash call being managed and it was identified there was skeleton staffing that day.

CONCLUSION

This exercise was designed to test the process and did highlight that there is a need to make it easier for the call handler when the alert comes in, as looking for the cascade list in the i-response pack is big and locating the actual cascade can take time so the Emergency Planning team have written an Action Card which will be located next to the telephone. This probably was the cause of the incorrect cascade on the day, not being help by a crash call being managed and many enquiries at the front desk.

There was a positive that the alert did reach the right people and the call handler did not deviate from the details, which meant there was no issues with staff being told the wrong information or thinking the alert was a real incident.

It has been decided that these exercises will continue monthly to support the switchboard team so they are comfortable with their role and the activation will be done at different times of the week, including weekends, to different departments so all areas of the Trust are able to test their response.

ACTIONS

Action	Responsible Team/ individual	Progress	Target completion date
Action Card for Major Incident cascade to be written and placed next to dedicated hotline in Switchboard	EPRR	Card drafted and with Richard Pearce for review	End of July 2023
Date for next Communications exercise to be agreed and diarised	EPRR	To be agreed once action card is approved and in place	End of July 2023