Active shooters: How to be proactive, prepared

As defined by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, an "active shooter" is an individual who is engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area. In most cases, active shooters use firearms(s), and there is no pattern or method to their selection of victims.

The Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) outlines several potential warning signs that may be applicable to staff, patients, visitors, students, contractors and volunteers:

- Individual presents increasingly erratic, unsafe or aggressive behavior.
- Individual threatens harm to themselves or others.
- Claims of marginalized or distancing from friends and colleagues.
- Changes in performance at work by staff member.
- Sudden and dramatic changes in home life or personality.
- Appearing out of place in staff-only, restricted access locations.
- Stalking and/or harassing of staff and patients.
- Observable grievances and making statement of retribution.
- Auditory indicators and menacing, antagonistic behavior.
- Staff, students, contractors and volunteers not displaying proper identification such as an ID badge.

Q In case of an active shooter, what should OMS practice staff do?

A If an active shooter has entered your practice or is in your vicinity, it is important to be prepared both mentally and physically. Staff should respond immediately and communicate the threat to law enforcement and any others present. Additionally, CISA outlines three response options for those in an active shooter situation:

- **RUN:** If there is an accessible escape path, avoid the assailant and attempt to evacuate the premises. Be sure to leave personal belongings behind, avoid elevators, encourage others to evacuate with you and call 911 when in a safe location.
- **HIDE:** If evacuation is not possible, find a place to hide and preserve the safety of patients and visitors. If possible, hide in a room with thick walls and limited windows and try to lock or blockade the door. Be sure to silence cell phones, turn off sources of noise, remain quiet and dial 911 to alert the police. Also, hiding places should be out of the assailant's view and not restrict your option to move.
- **FIGHT:** As a last resort – and only if your life is in imminent danger – attempt to disrupt or incapacitate the attacker by using available items, such as a fire extinguisher. Defend yourself and your patients – act aggressively, yell, throw items and improvise weapons.

For more information regarding response options, visit CISA.gov.

Q What are some mitigation strategies and protective measures my practice can implement?

A Because active shooter incidents are unpredictable, it is critical to take proactive steps for preparing your practice and staff. Implement an Emergency Action Plan (EAP) and conduct training exercises, being sure to consider specific characteristics of your facility during the planning process. Contributors to your EAP may include practice owners, human resources, property management and law enforcement/emergency responders. Effective training exercises may include recognizing the sound of gun shots, reviewing different responses – run, hide, fight – and calling 911. Be sure to maximize the protection of staff and patients with plans that address physical security, access, planning and personnel:

- Implement a practice-wide notification system.
- Post signage for emergency exits.
- Share your practice layout with your local law enforcement and first responders.
- Limit access to the building, monitoring credential systems and badge access.
- Develop an Emergency Action and Notification Plan.
- Conduct active shooter drills at least once per year.

For more information on creating an EAP, visit OSHA.org.

Q Are resources available to help train and prepare OMS practice staff for active shooter situations?

A The following organizations provide resources and training materials to help prepare for active shooter situations:

- Federal Bureau of Investigation: FBI.gov
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security: Ready.gov
- Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency: CISA.gov
- Federal Emergency Management Agency: Training.FEMA.gov
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: ASPRTracie.HHS.gov

Review available webinars, pamphlets, posters and other publications on these websites to learn what you and your practice can do and how best to respond. ■