The Challenge – Proactive Hospital Security

Medical Centers and other healthcare facilities face a growing need to manage a spectrum of security issues ranging from workplace violence, through crimes against assets and people, to cyber incidents and even terrorist threats.

These very same facilities also face a unique “dual mission” dilemma: on the one hand they must provide an unrestricted environment for patients, staff, visitors and contractors while on the other hand, they must provide for a threat free environment to minimize all risks and ensure the safety and well being of patients, staff and visitors – and their property.

Preparedness, practiced action plans, and proper access control are a healthcare facility’s first “line of defense”. This can only be accomplished with an effective Environment of Care Security Management Plan and Risk Assessment Process. But a truly successful security strategy cannot remain passive; it must take into account the special needs of the facility, both during routine and emergency periods, the public nature of the facility, and the threats posed to the facility and its users from the outside and from within. In short, a successful strategy must be proactive and multi-layered. It must be able to constantly evaluate and present solutions to dynamically evolving risks.

Facts and Threats:

The International Association for Healthcare Safety and Security (IAHSS), a non-profit organization with 1,900 members representing over 800 hospitals and healthcare facilities, published in 2010 the results of a survey about evolving hospital crime trends. The survey compared current findings with a similar survey conducted by the same organization in 2004.

Here are some of the survey’s findings (for the complete study, please refer to the Summer 2010 issue of the IAHSS Journal of Healthcare Protection Management (Vol. 26, No.2)):

“The total number of crimes reported by 212 healthcare facilities in the 10 categories of crime for 2009 was 14,986 (70.7 per hospital) compared to the 7,764 crimes (40.4 per hospital) reported in 2004 by 192 facilities. On a per hospital basis, this represents a 75% increase over the five-year period, returning to the crime levels reported between 1995 and 1998. An 11th category, kidnapping, was not reported in 2004. Five incidents in this category were reported in 2009.
Although overall crime in hospitals increased by 75% between 2004 and 2009, the survey reported that in four categories of violent crime (rape/sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault) it increased by 200%. In a fifth category, homicide, three murders were reported, one more than in 2004.

In the five non-violent crime categories, which account for 76% of all hospital crime (burglary, larceny, arson, vandalism, and motor vehicle theft), the survey reported a 54% increase in crime incidents compared to 2004. Only in one of the categories, motor vehicle theft, did the number of reported crime incidents go down--by 5%.

Hospitals are not hotbeds of crime, but they are not safe havens, either. They reflect crime conditions that exist in the community along with in-hospital conditions that increase the already high stress levels of patients, families, and caregivers confronting serious illness or injury.”
Some of the factors or stress conditions leading to increased violence in hospitals include:

- Increased gang activity
- Increased numbers of psychiatric patients seeking treatment in emergency departments because of closings of psychiatric facilities
- Overcrowding leading to long wait times
- The growing use of alcohol and drugs
- Open access that allows uninvited visitors and weapons into the hospital without detection
- Use of community hospitals to treat violent prisoners
- Testing those arrested for alcohol offenses prior to the police formally charging them
- Increased unemployment

**The Solution - Proactive Defense:**

Since Healthcare Organizations are facing a wide spectrum of potentially threatening situations, including: Infant Abduction, Workplace Violence, Crimes against Assets & People, Terrorists Threats and Cyber Incidents, preparedness, practiced action plans and available expertise are critical factors in maintaining safe and secure working environments at hospitals today.

TAL Global has been providing specialized services specifically tailored to the healthcare industry for over 20 years, engaging in varied, challenging projects at over 40 different healthcare facilities, from hospitals and laboratories, to nursing facilities. Project timelines have ranged from several days to several years.

The TAL Global team includes a wide variety of experts, from legal analysts, through undercover operatives, psychologists, threat assessment experts, forensic scientists, security auditors, digital forensic experts, audio and video monitoring professionals and surveillance and physical security experts that can respond to a number of concerns while being sensitive to the complex Joint Commission and OSHA Guidelines in which the medical center must operate in.
Our teams help healthcare organizations manage:

- Threat Assessments (of employees, former employees, staff members, including medical staff, patients and their relatives, friends or other antagonists)
- Compromise of Infant Security, both physically and electronically
- HIPAA violations
- Employee-employer relations (including labor actions, strikes)
- Employee empowering activities
- Active workplace violence detection, prevention and mitigation
- Drug-related situations (including importation of “street” drugs onto the premises and their distribution and/or usage, hospital-originating drug theft and/or usage)
- Physical Site Assessment to identify and mitigate against specific vulnerabilities (e.g., trespassing, external and internal criminal activity, gang activity, sexual predators, potential terrorists)
- Maximizing accessibility into an essentially public place, while minimizing threats to employees, patients, property and equipment
- Assist in the annual EOC Risk /Vulnerability Assessment
- Assist in the EOC’s Emergency Preparedness planning and drills

TAL Global’s experts will guide you to the following outcomes:

1) Detection and mitigation of and improved staff response to internal and external physical threats to staff, patients and visitors
2) Reduction of theft related losses
3) Increased data security
4) Review, analysis and improvement of physical security systems and processes
5) Removal of drug related threats (including drug and alcohol abuse interventions)
6) Creation, implementation, training and scheduled drills of a comprehensive infrastructure protection plan
7) Improved staff security and counter-terror resilience (physical & emotional)

The second part of this document contains several case studies that demonstrate a broad spectrum of hospital security issues and the solutions implemented by the TAL Global team.

Our experts will be glad to meet, discuss your concerns and needs. Please contact Mark Weston directly at 408-454-8254 or via email at mweston@talglobal.net.

Case Studies

Case Study #1

A hospital approached TAL Global with a request to find out if one of their former contract doctors conspired with current employees (nurses and doctors) to illegally obtain patient and hospital information, and to collect data to be used in pursuing legal action against the hospital.

This was a case that posed multiple challenges: operational, legal, ethical and security-related.

From a technical point-of-view, the investigators had to find a way to identify individuals who may have been colluding with the dismissed physician, detect these individuals' exact actions, including computer-related activities such as database searches, data retrieval, transfer of data to other computers (possibly outside the hospital).

Investigators implemented a complex surveillance project, including simultaneous data and video acquisition to validate when the individual of interest performed data-related actions at a particular computer/workstation. Furthermore, data forensics engineers had to create the conditions to enable them to capture and analyze all activity of the computer/workstation during specified time frames, and finally, investigators had to employ covert video monitoring techniques in the physician’s lounge (only place where the Internet was accessible) to validate the presence of person of interest at a particular system, during specific time periods.

Case Study #2

After a recent series of events involving a terminated employee’s contacts with members of the hospital staff that were viewed as threatening, a hospital engaged TAL Global to conduct a vulnerability audit to identify any inherent shortfalls in its security procedures and equipment and to modernize its programs.

The audit revealed several shortcomings in the facility’s physical security, including lack of fencing and access sentry posts. Additionally, the CCTV system was found to be ineffective and the fire suppression system for major portions of the hospital complex was in an unprotected area that allowed unauthorized access for anyone wishing to shut down its fire sprinkler system.
Case Study #3

A large hospital approached TAL Global to help with perceived street drug issues. It was not clear whether the drug related activity was employee-related or included non-employees.

In close collaboration and investigation with the hospital management, TAL Global established undercover surveillance of the facility by introducing an operative in the guise of a maintenance person. The investigation resulted in the identification of eight hospital employees who were involved in drug use and trade within the facility. Furthermore, it was established that employee’s drug related activities had a direct negative impact on the safety and security of both staff and patients. The identified employees were removed from the facility and the findings also provided support to management in improving on-site physical security and staff education.

Case Study #4

TAL Global was retained by a major hospital to conduct a background investigation on one of its managing nurses who was suspected of falsifying vaccination and payroll records and was also reported as having exhibited threatening behavior to her subordinates. Executive protection experts were dispatched to both the hospital facility and home of the threatened party. In the meantime, a threat of violence investigation was conducted and an expert investigator was dispatched to the hospital to conduct interviews of the nurse’s subordinates. Apart from a history of fraudulent check writing uncovered by the threat of violence investigation, interviews revealed that the nurse had a network of “minions” within the hospital that were her eyes and ears and helped to keep her unlawful actions quiet.

Case Study #5

A Southern California hospital invited TAL Global to investigate suspicions that in-house pharmacy drugs were being stolen and sold illegally within and outside the facility.

An undercover operative disguised as a member of the janitorial staff conducted an investigation that resulted in the detection, establishment of evidence and removal of the drug thief – a hospital pharmacy employee.