

Adapting healthcare security officer training to changing times

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The need to conduct field training programs of new officers instead of “learning by doing” has become essential as violent incidents in hospitals keep increasing, the author says. In this article he outlines the elements of a successful field training program.

The rate of violent crime, assaults and disorderly conduct incidents in hospitals have steadily risen in recent years. Healthcare security professionals are at the forefront of deterring and responding to these incidents. In the ever evolving world of healthcare, security departments must adapt their officer training to the changing times.

Law enforcement agencies across the country have adopted field training programs to orient new officers to the job. These programs have been in use for decades because of their effectiveness. The healthcare industry is unique to other security industries. Incidents like patient elopements, workplace violence and child abductions are just a few of the specific situations that healthcare security officers face on a daily basis. These situations, exclusive to healthcare, require special training regimens. While it is easier and costs less short term, it is not in the best interests of a

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department to place undertrained officers in the healthcare environment. The old tactic of “learning by doing” is antiquated and should be avoided. When officers are inadequately trained, the incident risk greatly increases.

FIELD TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR HEALTHCARE SECURITY OFFICERS

A Field Training and Evaluation program ensures that new officers are prepared to carry out their duties. These programs can be tailored to a particular security department’s needs and can be quite useful, just as they are in law enforcement. The use of a standardized training regimen under the supervision of a training officer will add continuity to a security department. Set training guidelines along with standardized testing for new hires will ensure that each officer has a complete understanding of his/her duties.

In order to ensure the success of a field training program, department leadership must select experienced security professionals to act as Field Training Officers. Such personnel must be keenly

aware of department policies and procedures. This role may also be fulfilled by a shift supervisor. It is the field training officer’s duty to properly train and evaluate new officers to ensure that they will be effective.

Phase 1: Department Policy

It is most important that new officers are aware of the security department’s policy. This information could be presented in different ways, depending upon the department’s needs. Powerpoint presentations, lecture or one on one instruction could be utilized. A form should be filled out and signed by both the recruit and FTO acknowledging that the officer has been made aware of the policies and will adhere to them. This will take liability off of the department if some conflict were to arise down the road.

With the increase of violent incidents in healthcare, it is important that security personnel are informed on use of force procedures. Hospital security personnel encounter violent patients and visitors on a frequent basis. This fact requires that officers receive specialized training to appropriately respond to violent events.

An effective way of establishing how and when security officers should use force is the implementation of a Use of Force Continuum. This will be unique to each organization's needs and perspective. A Use of Force Continuum will give officers a clear explanation of approved use of force by an organization. The continuum should be discussed and agreed upon by hospital management and the security department to minimize the risk of lawsuit against the organization. The continuum will be taught to officers by the FTO. Again, a form should be filled out and signed by both the officer and FTO, acknowledging that the officer has been made aware of the use of force policy and will adhere to it.

Phase 2: Field Training

Once the new officer is familiar with the department's policies, he/she should be ready for training in the field. The FTO will hands-on instruct the officer on duties. The length of the supervision will vary from officer to officer based on how quickly they can retain the information. In the beginning phase of field training, recruit officers should perform about 25% of the workload,

closely observing the FTO. Higher workloads will be assigned to the recruit as progression is made.

Once the FTO has determined that the recruit officer is ready, the FTO should take on a shadow role. The officer should be autonomous by the last stage of field training. The FTO will be closely monitoring the recruit officer to ensure that the officer performs up to standard. At the end of the field training phase, a checklist should be filled out by the FTO and recruit officer, acknowledging that standards have been met.

Phase Three: Cut Loose

Once the officer has been trained on the department's policies and has proven to be effective in the field, the officer is ready to be cut loose. A signed certificate of completion presented to the officer will give him/her a feeling of accomplishment. This use of positive reinforcement has been proven to motivate employees to do their job well. Officers will have an improved attitude when their accomplishments are recognized. If it is not already mandated by the organization, officers should be encouraged to obtain certification through the IAHS.

IN CONCLUSION

Introducing a Field Training and Evaluation Program to a healthcare security department will add to the professionalism of an agency. Incoming officers will be confident in their ability to handle the job and will be better prepared to handle the situations they will face in the healthcare industry. Better trained officers working for a hospital will pay off large dividends in the long term. The risk of lawsuit for excessive force will

be diminished when a management agreed upon use of force continuum is implemented. Acknowledgement forms for each phase of training should be placed in the officer's file. If a situation of dereliction of duty were to arise, an officer could not claim ignorance of policy. These signed forms will lessen the burden of liability onto a department in these situations. When the training regimen of officers is improved, the overall effectiveness of the department is increased as well.