Elevation of the healthcare security leader
Michael S. D’Angelo, CPP, CHPA

Opportunities for professional growth exist in most healthcare organizations, the author maintains. The level of workplace violence and crime in the healthcare setting has driven the need for better qualified security leaders, he reports. In this article he presents a road map for security professionals seeking to take their roles to the next level.

The position of security leader in any major healthcare organization has evolved significantly over the last two decades. Much of this is due to the work of organizations such as the IAHSS and similar professional groups that have added standards and guidelines to the industry. Credit also goes to the progressive healthcare executive who recognizes that increasing the importance of this position in the organization often brings the benefit of better qualified professionals. A good reason still is, unfortunately, the increase in crime and threats within the healthcare environment. One thing is certain in our industry, I believe, is that the days of giving the most senior security guard a 5% raise and calling him the Director of Security are all in the past.

Even with all these factors contributing to the heightened level of importance the security leader’s role plays in a healthcare
organization, credit must be attributed to the pride those in the industry take in their own professionalism and the key roles they play. They have done the most to take their own career paths into their hands. Today, within most hospitals we see the security leader role at either the Manager or Director level. At larger systems throughout the country, the position of Assistant Vice-President now exists. Some of the largest and certainly more progressive organizations, have integrated the security management role into the C-suite.

Security leaders must continue to evolve even within the most modern, forward thinking companies. Simply because the position exists, it does not translate to the leader being placed into the position. As mentioned in the opening paragraph, seniority once was the primary qualifier and while experience certainly counts, the security leader wishing to elevate his career status must commit to continuing professional development.

**ADVANCED EDUCATION**

In most private organizations, college education is a requirement for even entry level security management positions. At the Manager and Director level, expecting to see a bachelor’s degree as a mandatory educational requirement for the position is the norm. In an industry that sees a significant portion of its leadership transitioning from either law enforcement or the military, acquiring this level of education can be a challenge. To expect to grow within a large organization’s management structure, pursuing a master’s degree would be beneficial. Fortunately, for professionals in healthcare security management, the major is not always as important as the degree itself. Criminal justice, Business, and Human Resources are all management level fields of study that will serve the security leader well. If you seek to eventually migrate out of the security field into a broader range of executive leadership within healthcare, any degree in the healthcare administration category may serve you better.

For the mid-manager level security leader aspiring to advance, who may not currently possess advanced education, returning to school no longer has the accompanying challenges it once did. Today, almost every major educa-
tion institution has online based programs. Once looked at as somehow a lesser quality of education, online programs are now on par with campus-based programs of study. For example; in Florida there are 78 colleges in the public university system 1. Every one of these offers fully online programs for bachelor and master’s degree programs. There are even a few emerging private universities providing advanced doctoral degree programs completely online. The online method of delivery does not work for everyone. Its greatest benefit being convenience; however, to be successful, an online college education requires a great amount of self-discipline. For others, the desire to learn through face to face interaction with fellow students may be helpful.

In addition to the many education options, another advantage is tuition assistance programs that many healthcare companies provide for their employees. They may vary in amount and terms usually require a specified period of employment (not a difficulty for those pursuing an education in order to move up within their organization), but these incentives make the achievement of advanced college degrees more accessible for healthcare security professionals and certainly more affordable.

PEER-BASED DEVELOPMENT

A career professional in any industry belongs to professional associations specific to their field. Although the value and benefits of each may vary, collectively, they share the attribute of bringing likeminded professionals together. The ability to interact and learn industry best practices with, and from your colleagues is of immense value to the security leader wishing to evolve into the security executive. Where once there were only a handful, today an entire article could be devoted to outlining security industry professional associations.

Regardless, if your membership is out of your own pocket or you are fortunate to work for a healthcare organization that pays professional association dues for its managers, spend your money

1http://www.answers.com/Q/How_many_colleges_are_in_Florida
wisely when choosing which is the best fit. Ideally, in the security industry it makes sense to belong to a broad reaching association that will keep you current such as ASIS International. With over 35,000 members worldwide and the publication of what many consider the industry body of knowledge, ASIS is an excellent starting point for anyone in the security field.

Additionally, membership to a professional association that deals specifically with your sector of the security industry has tremendous value in providing you with tools that can aid you in just about any challenge. In our industry that organization is the International Association for Healthcare Security & Safety. Being able to call upon peers from within your sector to provide guidance and suggestion is irreplaceable. Knowing that someone else in your field has encountered the same challenge you may be facing serves as a source of tremendous reassurance.

PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATIONS

A security practitioner who has been in the field for a significant length of time recognizes that the appropriate certifications add credibility and designation to their status as professionals. Their value to security leaders is on par with advanced education. Not long ago our field had a handful of certifications you could pursue of significant credibility. With little hesitation, most would agree that the Certified Protection Professional issued by ASIS International is the gold standard in the security industry\(^2\). However, the CPP indicates mastery of a general body of security knowledge.

Pursuing and achieving a designation specific to your sector of security brings a level of respect that can set you apart from the masses. When the IAHSS first developed the Certified Healthcare Protection Administrator, healthcare security became one of the first industries within security to have its own professional certification. The CHPA\(^3\) designation indicates that a security professional has gone further in their professional development to learn

\(^2\) https://www.asisonline.org/certification/certified-protection-professional-cpp/

\(^3\) http://www.iahss.org/default.asp?page =certifications#one
more than just security. The materials that must be mastered for this course of study include standards and guidelines disseminated by The Joint Commission, the National Fire Protection Administration, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the Occupational Safety and Hazards Administration. Clearly, achieving the CHPA qualifies a healthcare security leader as a manager in healthcare operations.

There many other viable certifications healthcare security professionals can pursue. A word of caution; as our industry continues to grow, so too will the chance of opportunistic organizations which advertise "certifications." These so-called "checkbook" certifications (you are certified as soon as your check clears) require nothing more than payment. If there is no value in the effort required to achieve the designation, then they will carry very little credibility among your peers. Clearly, acquiring just a single certification of prominence far outweighs listing the alphabet after your name if it is comprised of mostly checkbook certifications. Similarly, to advanced education, you are making a commitment of time and money—choose wisely.

EXPAND YOUR COMMUNITY

Investing time and dollars (whether your own or your organization's) in your career development requires that the healthcare security leader become prudent in the pursuit of growth within their company. Immersing yourself in healthcare security makes obvious sense, but as you grow within the organization, executives will be looking to leaders with well-rounded experience in more than just their particular field. Your involvement in other areas of the corporate world can come to fruition in a variety of ways. Your participation not only adds to your growth as a professional, but also reflects well on your organization.

Civic groups always welcome participation from companies within the community. Hospitals are considered key community partners and their involvement would be welcomed. Even smaller, rural healthcare facilities will find a local branch of the Rotarians, Kiwanis, Elk, and other similar groups. Your involvement here will likely lead to volunteer
commitments to worthwhile events, as these groups often sponsor art festivals, parades, holiday events and children’s charities.

Your involvement in worthwhile events can continue into your local community through interactions with local governments. Whether your healthcare organization resides in a municipal city of unincorporated parts of the county, all local governments have a wide variety of committees comprised of volunteers from local business. Again, much like involvement in civic groups, this type of service shines a positive light on your organization while providing you with new opportunities. On a more formal note, county and city emergency operations departments look to hospitals for participation in the pre-disaster planning groups.

As part of the National Incident Management System, Emergency Support Function 8, provides the mechanism for Federal assistance to supplement local and state resources in response to a public health emergency. Local hospitals and healthcare systems are a vital part of the ESF8 activations and security leaders should team with their emergency preparedness colleagues to take a proactive role in collaborating with their government counterparts. Yet another opportunity to demonstrate your ability to perform in roles not directly connected to your security function.

**INTERNAL OPPORTUNITIES**

There is no better place to start your development than within your organization. Many healthcare systems offer internal leadership development programs, some at the executive level. By striving to participate in advancement programs designed for “promoting from within,” you convey the message to senior leadership that you are striving for advancement. These programs are usually comprised of a myriad of leaders from different departments within the organization, affording the security leader the opportunity to work with colleagues outside their normal circles.

Even if your healthcare organization does not offer a formal leadership program, convey the

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4 https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/25512
message to your direct leader that you want to grow. Many executives would feel confident providing their security director with a stretch assignment that tasks you with a project outside the scope of your normal duties. Imagine the credibility you will achieve when you perform well in a new environment? This type of project not only demonstrates your ability to grow as a leader but goes a long way to enhance relationships with other hospital departments. Security regularly works hand in hand with Human Resources, Safety, Privacy, IT Security and Facilities departments. Completing a significant project hand in hand with colleagues from any of these departments speaks volumes to your ability to work with and even lead diverse teams.

CONCLUSION

Just as in your personal life, you are the driver steering the course of your career. Yes, there are many outside factors such as the size and position of your employer in the healthcare industry that impact the level of professionalism bestowed upon the security department, but the motivation to succeed and evolve is an internal choice. Opportunities for professional growth exist in most healthcare organizations. Indeed, the level of workplace violence and crime in the healthcare setting has driven the need for better qualified security leaders. Taking the role to the next level encompasses many steps. Are you satisfied where you are as a healthcare security leader? If so, great. If you want to develop more and perhaps explore other opportunities, the steps are there, now its time to get started.