

## Securing Nevada's only level 1 trauma center following this country's deadliest mass shooting

Louis Lepera

---

*The Las Vegas mass shooting in October 2017 was the deadliest mass shooting committed by an individual in the United States, with 58 people dead and hundreds injured or shot. One of the hospitals in the area which received victims was University Medical Center. In this article, the author describes what the hospital experienced and the management of Public Safety officers to meet changing requirements. These included a mass influx of family members and friends, national and local media, and well-meaning individuals, and, in addition, preparing for a host of VIP visitors which included the President of the United States.*

(Louis Lepera is Director of Public Safety at University Medical Center Southern Nevada in Las Vegas. He has over thirty years experience in law enforcement and in the private sector, 14 of them as a healthcare safety and security professional. He is a member of IAHSS.)

University Medical Center is the only Level 1 Trauma Center in the state of Nevada, the only Level 2 Pediatric Trauma center, and the home of the only American Burn Association verified Burn Care Center in Nevada for Adult and Pediatrics. During the early evening of Sunday, October 1, 2017 there were over 22,000 in attendance at the Route 91 Harvest Country Music Festival at the Las Vegas Concert Venue on the Las Vegas Strip, when reports were received of multiple shots fired at the event. As additional reports were received, a single shooter was identified on the thirty-second floor of the Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino. While the number of wounded and killed remained unconfirmed, injured concert goers who were able to flee sought care at area hospitals. University Medical Center received over a hundred victims.

At approximately 2200 hours that evening I received an initial call from my shift Lieutenant informing me that they had received confirmation of a mass casualty and notification of an influx of wounded to the Trauma center resulting from an active shooter at the Route 91 Harvest Festival. With confirmation of an active shooter, UMC went into a facility lockdown until we received affirmation that the shooter was either in custody or the threat was neutralized.

### **WORKING WITH LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES**

UMC has a cohesive and collaborative long standing working relationship with all local law enforcement agencies which made a positive impact on our internal response. A relationship with your local law enforcement agencies is essential to medical facilities. Establishing a partnership with law enforcement will facilitate your ability to prepare for the next stages of response. Upon my arrival to the hospital property, I had already received three calls from Las Vegas Metropolitan Police. My direct line of communication with local law enforcement al-

lowed me to obtain real time information and details in order for us to take the necessary security precautions to better manage the aftermath within our healthcare facility.

Within twenty minutes of the initial call from Las Vegas Metro, an outside perimeter at the surrounding streets leading to the hospital was established. The established perimeter made certain that only the walking wounded made their way for medical assistance and employees reporting for duty. Employees who failed to bring employee badges were not allowed to pass the perimeter.

### **ACTIVATING THE HOSPITAL INCIDENT COMMAND CENTER**

Details on the shooter and conditions remained preliminary. Hospital administration was consulted on the information received from law enforcement. With the circumstances of the active shooter still unclear and the large medical surge that resulted, the decision was made to activate the hospital incident command. Our hospital incident command center remained open the entire week until Friday, October 6, at 1500 hours. During the time the center



conducted operational briefings conducted at the top of each hour. We found it necessary to keep incident command open for six days to manage not only the situations that resulted from the mass casualties, but also for the visit of President Trump that proceeded, as well as the VIP and entertainer visits that followed.

#### **MAKING ADDITIONAL PUBLIC SAFETY UNITS AVAILABLE**

The outside perimeter established by Las Vegas Metro Police facilitated my ability to assign Public Safety officers at each of the main point of entry to the facility, providing an added security layer to the hospital, as the details of additional shooters was unconfirmed.

Meanwhile the first of many wounded civilians in private vehicles arrived within ten minutes from our initial notification. Thereafter, one vehicle after another continued to arrive with more injured civilians; in addition to those wounded being transported by ambulance. With the injured arriving in private vehicles, we had no indication of how many individuals to expect. Upon the first arrival of wounded civil-

ians, officers were dispatched to our trauma center entry point to assist with the increased activity in our trauma center. Given the circumstances, officers were transitioned from eight-hour shifts to twelve-hour shifts. This adjustment made additional Public Safety units available to assist with maintaining the emergency room and trauma unit clear for additional wounded, directing friends and family foot traffic to the designated family waiting and meeting areas, limiting news and media access to the facility, and increasing checks in our security sensitive areas.

In a mass shooting, along with mass casualties comes an influx of family members who are looking for their loved ones or anxious to be reunited with them. The number of family and friends arriving to your facility can quickly increase in seconds. To simplify a process to reunite wounded with their family members, the family meeting area was set up for this purpose.

#### **TEAMWORK AND COLLABORATION**

My Public Safety team consists largely of former military and law enforcement personnel. Our team

was able to quickly utilize our previous experience to expedite duties in an unvarying and consistent manner. Having experienced staff familiarizes individuals with tactics and groundwork to cope with and manage situations.

The teamwork displayed among our team and the collaboration among all of the UMC hospital staff was astounding. The unity among the UMC, law enforcement, and first responders that night and the days that followed made response and executing plans of action smooth and almost effortless.

### **LESSONS LEARNED**

Healthcare facilities practice and prepare with regular exercises and disaster drills. However, there are circumstances that arise that force us to learn how to better manage situations.

We had a very large number of media outlets that made their way to our facility quickly. They were not just local media outlets; they were national outlets (i.e., CNN, ABCNews, TMZ, etc.) that quickly responded. The media was already in town to cover O.J. Simpson being released from prison so they were quick to arrive. The Public Safety team was

able to promptly manage the media outlets, eliminating any HIPAA concerns by working closely with our strong hospital Public Relations team.

The visit of the President, which was planned on short notice, and the subsequent VIP and high profile entertainers that visited, was something our team had not planned for.

On average, high profile and government official visits take two weeks or so to plan. During this time we were able to manage the visits with three days of planning. Having a VIP handling policy in place and training exercises regularly helped facilitate the quick action.

Finally, UMC received an immense community outpouring of water, food, and other donations that were not anticipated. We had to execute an unexpected plan of action to establish a drop off location, staff the location, and management of the donations for distribution to the wounded and their family members.

Healthcare facilities educate and practice drills and exercises to better prepare staff to cope with and execute procedures in the event of such as the event UMC

faced. One does not realize the extent and aptitude a healthcare community, law enforcement, and first responders have when coming together as one. October 1 changed our Las Vegas commu-

nity and our facility as a whole. Administrators, engineers, nurses, supervisors, clerks, and doctors worked as one, without regard of titles. That week we learned how to be Vegas Strong.