Does Your Organization Have a Disaster Plan?

Disasters can happen anywhere, and at anytime. Many of these disasters can have a significant impact on your organization, your constituents, your employees and their families, and the community you serve. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has created mandatory disaster preparedness guidelines for certain providers as a Condition for Coverage or Participation. In addition to these guidelines, CMS also offers a preparedness checklist for all providers. Don’t be unprepared. Experts agree that advance planning and preparedness can make a significant difference during an emergency.

Advance planning & creating a disaster plan
If you haven’t already, take the time now, before a crisis occurs, to make a disaster plan for your facility. How quickly your organization can get back to business depends on the emergency planning done today.

Six key things to include in your disaster plan:

1 | Prepare an office disaster kit
You want to have a kit prepared in advance to allow you to provide basic medical care where necessary. This kit should include some essential medical supplies and equipment and be stored in a safe, easy-to-access location. Below are just a few examples of the types of items to include in your kit:

- Essential business documents
- Computer backups
- Emergency rations, bottled water, flashlights
- Hand sanitizer and other infection prevention items
- Exam gloves and other essential personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Stethoscope, thermometer, etc.
- Prescription pad
- Bandages

2 | Plan for a possible alternate office location or evacuation of your facility
Do some advance research on potential locations where you could continue to care for clients if your primary office is damaged. You may also want to purchase a generator for use if the power is out for a period of time.
For healthcare organizations providing in-facility resident care, such as long term care facilities, evaluate and make decisions on Shelter-in-Place (SIP) provisions so you are prepared when a disaster such as flood or prolonged loss of power occurs. You should also plan for what you will do if your community is not accessible to emergency responders, vendors and employees.

3 | Have backup plans for client records
This is crucial for your facility. Have multiple backup methods for redundancy, and keep the backups in an off-site location. Also make sure the records are accessible to you and your staff so treatment can continue.
Backup options include:

- Online (cloud) storage
- Remote server
- Portable hard drive
- Flash drive/memory card

4 | Use a team approach by including staff/employees in the planning process
Review disaster preparedness plan details with all staff members on a regular basis. Personal contact information (e.g., cell phone numbers, email addresses, emergency contact information) for all staff should be shared for vital communications during a disaster. Designate critical staff, volunteer coverage, and how to meet staff needs such as transportation to and from work.

5 | Plan for communication with vital stakeholders
Determine how and what you might communicate to patients, residents, family members, and the community in a crisis. Plan for various communications methods, which can include:

(a) Text messaging (b) Email (c) Social media (d) Voicemail (e) Word of mouth

6 | Review your plan annually
Perform an internal review of the emergency plan on an annual basis and update if necessary based on factors such as regulatory changes, potential new hazards, and budgetary considerations. Also consider these topics in your facility’s disaster plan:

- Telehealth and virtual provider interface
- Emergency nutritional supplies
- Personal Protective Equipment (and gear for highly contaminated locations)
- External access to important procedures and protocols
- Staff fatigue and accommodations