

Best of Silver Anvil Highlights: Carilion Crisis Communications Response to WDBJ7 Shootings

PRSA

On the morning of August 26, 2015, WDBJ7 reporter Alison Parker and videographer Adam Ward were killed during their morning show's last live segment around 6:45 a.m. Interviewee Vicki Gardner was rushed by ambulance to Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital (CRMH), the region's level 1 designated trauma center, for emergency surgery.

Carilion Clinic's crisis communications team began monitoring the event



by 6:50 that morning, but their work actually started long before that.

Carilion Clinic's crisis communications team is made up of marketing, research and communications experts. They also have

a specially trained incident command team (ICT) of employees representing various departments, including clinical and non-clinical employees who have the relevant expertise and experience needed in managing incidents. They work with outside agencies to assist with hospital operations and safety, eliminate duplication of effort and provide logistical and administrative support.

The Clinic's crises plan breaks down crisis response to its fundamentals – preparedness/mitigation, response and recovery – and is designed to remind users of appropriate steps to take and needs to anticipate in a crisis. It offers the base framework for communicating during a crisis.

Most importantly, the plan highlights the necessity of continued plan evolution and application through exercises and drills. As a result of this planning, Carilion is able to actively anticipate and respond to any crisis, not just react to an immediate need.

By 8 a.m. the day of the shooting members of the ICT met to debrief and draft the first internal messages. Objectives were to:

1. Facilitate an efficient flow of timely, accurate and credible information between all parties.
2. Protect the victim's family by anticipating their needs and the needs of the media.
3. Help the community cope and heal after such a devastating loss.

As the day progressed, the ICT drafted internal and external statements and planned a contingency news conference (later sending a representative to the Sheriff's press conference instead).

In the days that followed, they maintained a log of media

requests so none would be overlooked, issued daily patient condition reports, used social media to distribute messages concerning medical office closings, and coordinated media interviews for Vicki Gardner's husband.

One standout among activities too numerous to list was the creation of videos about coping with loss at any age and addressing grief with children, as many children had seen the shooting live on television while they were getting ready for school.

Carilion's response illustrated extreme professionalism in the face of personal tragedy.

For more information, click here: <https://bit.ly/2018anvils>.