Staff Response to an Active Threat Event
TERMINAL PERFORMANCE

OBJECTIVES

- By the end of this presentation, staff members will have a better understanding of their options and how to respond to an Active Threat Event in progress.
ENABLING PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

- EPO #1: Define an Active Threat Event.
- EPO #2: Explain the general characteristics associated with Active Threat suspects.
- EPO #3: Explain the notification procedures in the event of an Active Threat Event.
- EPO #4: List three options available to staff to protect their own life during an Active Threat Event.
- EPO #5: Explain what information should be relayed to 911 dispatchers.
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OBJECTIVES

- EPO #6: Explain what first responding officers to an Active Threat Event are trained to do.
- EPO #7: Explain what actions staff should take upon police arrival.
- EPO #8: Identify follow-up actions that staff may be called upon to do.
- EPO #9: Explain what VA Medical Centers can do to better prepare for an Active Threat Event.
INTRODUCTION

During this training, Medical Center staff will be presented with some key information regarding Active Threat Events. There are numerous instances throughout history where criminals have randomly killed as many victims as possible during one incident before taking their own lives or being stopped by law enforcement. These types of “mass killings” became know as “Active Shooter Incidents” after the tragedy at Columbine High School in April, 1999.

Active threat events can, and do occur wherever large groups of people congregate – in the workplace, shopping malls, schools, movie theatres and places of worship. Unfortunately the reality is that VA Medical Centers are susceptible to an Active Shooter Event as well. Therefore, it is imperative that staff are trained to recognize an Active Threat Event and know what to do, in addition to understanding how VA Police Officers are trained to respond.
DEFINITION OF AN ACTIVE THREAT EVENT: The event is described as an emergency situation involving a person or persons who are actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area by acts of either random or systematic violence.

- The overriding objective appears to be that of mass murder, rather than criminal conduct such as robbery, kidnapping, etc.

- Active Threat Events include any assault with a deadly weapon (guns, knives, explosives, etc) with one objective in mind; causing as many deaths as possible.
CHARACTERISTICS ASSOCIATED WITH AN ACTIVE THREAT SUSPECT(S) VS. ACTIVE THREAT(S).

- Suspects choose populated areas to commit the assaults such as, schools, theaters, churches and shopping malls.
- The suspect(s) usually have some degree of familiarity of the location of the event.
- A variety of weapons are used in different ways.
  - Some suspects engage multiple victims at close range using edged weapons, pistols, shotguns or submachine guns.
  - Some suspects engage victims at longer distances using a rifle.
  - Some Suspects engage victims and first responders with Improvised Explosive Devices (IED).
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OBJECTIVE #2

- CHARACTERISTICS ASSOCIATED WITH AN ACTIVE THREAT EVENT(S).
  - Focus is on harming anyone whom they come into contact with.
  - The assault is generally not focused on one particular victim or group of victims, but rather on “targets of opportunity”.
  - Little to no warning is given before the assault begins.
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OBJECTIVE #2

- A considerable amount of time is spent planning to include weapons of choice.

- The suspect(s) are usually suicidal and have no escape plan.

- The assault will continue until the suspect either commits suicide or is neutralized by police.
EXPLAIN THE NOTIFICATION PROCEDURES IN THE EVENT OF AN ACTIVE THREAT EVENT:

- While mode or delivery of an Active Threat Event may vary by facility such as Giant Voice (PA System), phone, internet or all the above, it is vital that the alert/notification be sounded as quickly as possible.

- Plain English identifying an “Active Threat” is in progress with location, if known can be used throughout the VA.

- When an Active Threat Event is announced it should be immediately followed by the location, i.e., “Active Threat Firearms”, Bldg. #XYZ, 3rd Floor or Ward XYZ.
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OBJECTIVE #3

- This will provide those in or near the affected area the information they need to initiate their response.

- From the time the Active Threat Event begins until it is announced there is an unavoidable time lapse, which may give the suspect(s) the opportunity to relocate.
LIST THREE OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO STAFF TO PROTECT THEIR OWN LIFE DURING AN ACTIVE THREAT EVENT.

- Events are often over before law enforcement can respond and only occur over a span of a few minutes (e.g. Fort Hood shooting). Maj. Nidal Hasan, before being engaged by DOD Police and wounded, there were 43 casualties, 12 of which were soldiers, 1 civilian employee and 30 people were wounded and required hospitalization.

- Virginia Tech gunman Seung-hui Cho killed 30 and wounded 17 in approximately 10 minutes. This means staff is often in a better position to mitigate loss of life than police.
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OBJECTIVE #4

- As soon as you become aware of an event, you need to act quickly to determine the most reasonable way to protect your own life.

- The fundamental intent of this training is to provide you the information you need to assess your situation rapidly, to help you choose the best/safest course of action.
There are generally three options to choose from. The best option for you will be based upon the specific circumstances or situation you are in at the time you become aware of the event. Here are some factors you need to consider:

- What type of setting are you in; patient care, office, outside etc.?
- Are there others in your immediate area who need your assistance?
- Are they mobile or do they have limitations?
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OBJECTIVE #4

- The options that are most widely accepted are: Evacuate (RUN) Evade (Shelter in Place and Hide), or as a last resort, Engage (Take action against the attacker(s) and fight).

- The Evacuate, Evade, Engage model has been widely distributed and accepted throughout the Federal Government.

- All models, including Evacuate, Evade or Engage emphasize how important it is for you to understand how to properly assess and make the best decision for your particular situation.
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OBJECTIVE #4

**EVACUATE:** Unlike a fire emergency, evacuation is best suited in a setting where you have clear access to an escape route, or are in the immediate area of the attack. The idea is to get as many Victims/Targets out of the area as possible to reduce casualties. Traditional philosophy is that you should encourage others to flee with you, but not to wait if they hesitate. In other words “look out for number one.” If your assessment indicates that this is the best course of action for you then act swiftly, get out and away from the affected area. Staff should attempt to evacuate if:

- You are caught in the immediate vicinity of the assault, or
- You are notified of the assault and have a visible, unobstructed path to safety.
- Employees will report to their identified evacuation points outside the facility and wait for further instructions from the Police or their leadership.
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OBJECTIVE #4

- If a staff member decides to evacuate, he or she should:
  - Leave personal belongings behind
  - Help others, *if possible*
  - Prevent others from entering the threat area, *if possible*
  - Keep their hands visible
  - Follow the instructions of any police officers
  - Do not attempt to move wounded people
  - Do not attempt to drive away
  - Call 911 when they are safe
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**OBJECTIVE #4**

- **EVADE:** Often during an Active Threat Event, one of the best courses of action for staff, patients and visitors is to **“EVADE AND SHELTER IN PLACE” OR “LOCK DOWN”** in their immediate vicinity. If there is a relatively secure location to hide nearby, in the absence of a clearly safe escape route, staff should shelter themselves, patients and visitors in a secure location and lock down until the threat is neutralized. Most doors in the Medical Center are solid core and able to be locked. Many walls are constructed of block and brick. These are likely to provide some protections. Staff should secure their immediate area by:
  - Locking and barricading doors with whatever is available (i.e. desks, file cabinets, beds, etc.).
  - Turning off lights, radios and computer monitors
  - Blocking windows and closing blinds
  - Silencing cell phones
Once secured, staff should also:

- Take cover within the location behind heavy furniture, equipment, etc.
- Remain calm, quiet and out of sight (and encourage others to do the same - remember, calm is contagious)
- Contact authorities if possible (if you cannot speak, leave the line open and allowing the dispatcher to listen)
- Render basic first aid to injured person *if feasible*, as not to endanger your life or the lives of others
- Place signs in exterior windows to identify the location of the injured
DISCUSSION:

- The choice to Evacuate (Run) or Evade (Shelter in place and Hide) yourself and others, are two options that may carry equal benefits. It is impossible to identify all situations where one option would be better than another. Staff in an office environment may have a better chance of evacuation when those in the area are mobile and can assist each other with moving to safety.

- People who attempt to evacuate may leave a position of relative safety and expose themselves to the threat. Law Enforcement officers forced to manage people evacuating will also have more difficulty locating, responding to and neutralizing the threat. In short, a mass evacuation adds chaos to an already chaotic situation and may even serve to give the suspect more opportunity to harm more innocents.
Staff in a clinical area may choose to evade and “Shelter in Place” when having the ability to move patients to safer locations within the clinical areas that can be locked or barricaded.

**ENGAGE**: Staff should take action against the suspect only as a last resort when their life is in immediate and imminent danger. If action is taken against the suspect, staff must be committed to acting swiftly and aggressively to disrupt and/or incapacitate the attacker(s).

**NOTE**: It is not mandatory for employees to engage an Active Shooter, this option should only be exercised if the options Evade and Evacuate have been exhausted.
EXPLAIN WHAT INFORMATION SHOULD BE RELAYED TO 911 DISPATCHERS

Contact the Police: Immediate notification of police is crucial. As soon as possible, staff should contact the police and relay as much information as they can. Remember, the police emergency line may be overwhelmed.

Staff should be aware of alternate means of contacting the police (i.e. police non-emergency line, police email, panic alarm activation, etc.) Information to be relayed to dispatchers should include:
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OBJECTIVE #5

- The specific location of the suspect (building & room numbers, floors, etc.)
- The number of suspects (Do you know the suspect(s)? What are their names?)
- The suspect’s physical description (race, gender, clothing color and style—is the suspect wearing a backpack or carrying a bag?)
- The number and type of weapons involved (i.e. pistol, long-gun etc. – have you heard gunfire? Have you heard an explosion?)
- When contacting the authorities, the most important thing that staff can do is to remain calm and be a good witness
EXPLAIN WHAT FIRST RESPONDING OFFICERS TO AN ACTIVE THREAT EVENT ARE TRAINED TO DO.

The prior era of police response to an Active Threat Event was one of “secure the perimeter and wait for SWAT.”

In the modern era, first responders no longer contain the situation and wait for “SWAT” First responders are trained to respond directly, and as quickly as possible to assertively, and decisively engage and neutralize the Active Threat thereby, preventing the further loss of innocent life.

VA police officers are armed with Department-approved weapons and are the primary, initial response force to an Active Threat incident on a VA-owned campus.
VA Police officers complete substantial training in Active Threat Response.

Responding officers will most likely be in duty uniform and may be from multiple agencies. The first responding officers will not stop to aid the injured.
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OBJECTIVE #7

EXPLAIN WHAT ACTIONS STAFF SHOULD TAKE UPON POLICE ARRIVAL

Upon Police arrival, staff should:
- Immediately follow directions
- Put down any items they are holding (i.e. bags, jackets etc.)
- Keep hands visible at all times
- Remain in sheltered location
- Relay as much information as possible to any responding officers
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OBJECTIVE #7

- Upon Police arrival, **staff should not:**
  - Make quick movements towards officers
  - Hold onto officer for safety
  - Point and scream
IDENTIFY FOLLOW UP ACTIONS THAT STAFF MAY BE CALLED UPON TO DO

After police have neutralized the threat and secured the area, teams of rescue personnel comprised of medical staff and police officers will follow.

Staff may be called upon to help treat and move the injured.

If you have sheltered in place, do not un-secure and leave your area until you have visual or audible confirmation by a police officer or supervisor that it is safe to come out.

If you are unsure, remain barricaded in the secure location.
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OBJECTIVE #9

- EXPLAIN WHAT VA MEDICAL CENTERS CAN DO TO BETTER PREPARE FOR AN ACTIVE THREAT

As with any other emergency situation, preparation greatly increases one’s likelihood of survival. VA Medical Centers should prepare for an Active Threat event by:

- Having an Emergency Action Plan
- Maintaining and emergency notification system
- Disseminating information to employees
- Training employees for an Active Threat event
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OBJECTIVE #9

- Coordinating and training with local law enforcement and EMS
- Maintaining good physical security
- Conducting effective employee screening and background checks
- Maintaining a system where staff, patients, and visitors can report signs of potential violent behavior
Automatic implementation of a facility lock down may or may not be appropriate for an Active Threat event. Currently, a lockdown is often advocated in an Active Threat event. That is, secure the potential victims in a locked room(s). But, if it is possible to move out of the affected area, considerations for evacuation and escape must be made.

Additional Physical Security measure considerations should be given to those areas within the facility where the best option is to “shelter in place”. This could be due to the location and the ability of staff members to quickly and safely evacuate themselves, visitors and those patients that, due to physical limitations are unable to evacuate without assistance.
CONCLUSION

- The truth is, the facility staff can do more to mitigate the loss of life than police, due to being on scene when the Active Threat Event starts. The need for training staff how to recognize, react to and prevent Active Threat Events is critical.

- Furthermore, employees will have added responsibilities to account for patients and visitors. Having active threat incidents as part of a facilities comprehensive safety plan is simply not enough. Preparation and training for all employees to an Active Threat event is an important step.
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OBJECTIVE #1 REVIEW

1. According to the definition of an Active Shooter Event, the overriding objective appears to be that of __________, rather than criminal conduct such as robbery, kidnaping, etc.
   A. Revenge
   B. Mass Murder
   C. Terrorism
   D. Escape

2. By definition, weapons used in an Active Threat Event Include:
   A. Any deadly weapon causing mass homicide to include guns, knives and/or explosives.
   B. Guns Only.
   C. Any weapon you could threaten someone with.
   D. “Assault Rifles” and bombs.
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   D. “Assault Rifles” and bombs.
3. General Characteristics commonly associated with an Active Threat suspect includes:
   A. They usually are unfamiliar with the location of the event.
   B. They intend to kill as many people as possible, as quickly as possible.
   C. They don’t spend much time or effort planning.
   D. All of the above.

4. Generally speaking, Active Threat Events do not focus on one individual or group, but rather on “targets of opportunity”.
   A. True
   B. False
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   D. All of the above.

4. Generally speaking, Active Threat Events do not focus on one individual or group, but rather on “targets of opportunity”.
   A. True
   B. False
5. VA Medical Centers should prepare for an Active Threat Event by maintaining an emergency notification system, training employees and providing good physical security.

A. True  
B. False
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A. True

B. False
6. When Evading (sheltering in place), staff should:

   A. Lock and barricade doors with whatever is available.
   B. Turn off lights, radios and computer monitors
   C. Silence all cell phones
   D. All of the above

7. Staff members who decide to Evacuate should:

   A. Collect any personal belongings
   B. Ignore responding police officers
   C. Drag wounded victims to safety
   D. Keep their hands visible and follow police instructions
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A. Collect any personal belongings
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C. Drag wounded victims to safety
D. Keep their hands visible and follow police instructions
10. In the event of an Active Threat, staff should:

A. Only attempt to escape when they are notified of the event and have a visible, unobstructed path to safety
B. Only attempt to escape when they are caught in the immediate vicinity of the event
C. Both A&B
D. Always attempt to evacuate and evade, no matter what
10. In the event of an Active Threat, staff should:

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C. Both A&B
D. Always attempt to evacuate and evade, no matter what
11. Information that should be relayed to dispatchers include:

A. The specific location
B. The number of suspects
C. The suspect(s) physical description
D. All of the above

12. When contacting the authorities, the most important thing that staff can do is to:

A. Remain calm and be a good witness
B. Scream into the phone to ensure the dispatcher can hear you
C. Provide your location so police can find you
D. Provide details about the make, model and caliber of
ENABLING PERFORMANCE
OBJECTIVE #5 REVIEW

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A. Remain calm and be a good witness
B. Scream into the phone to ensure the dispatcher can hear you
C. Provide your location so police can find you
D. Provide details about the make, model and caliber of firearm
13. The primary mission of the first responding officers is to treat and evacuate the wounded.

A. True
B. False

14. Police officers responding to an Active Threat event are trained to:

A. Secure the perimeter and wait for S.W.A.T.
B. Escort EMT personnel to aid the injured
C. Respond quickly and directly to neutralize the threat
D. Evacuate injured victims
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B. False

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C. Respond quickly and directly to neutralize the threat  
D. Evacuate injured victims
15. Upon Police arrival, **staff should** immediately follow the directions of responding officers, keep their hands visible at all times and rely as much information possible to responding offices.

A. True  
B. False  

16. Upon Police arrival, **staff should not** make quick movements towards officers, hold onto officers for safety or point and scream.

A. True  
B. False
15. Upon Police arrival, staff should immediately follow the directions of responding officers, keep their hands visible at all times and relay as much information possible to responding offices.

A. True  
B. False

16. Upon Police arrival, staff should not make quick movements towards officers, hold onto officers for safety or point and scream.

A. True  
B. False
17. Staff may be called upon after the threat has been neutralized to help treat or moved injured persons.

A. True
B. False

18. If you have sheltered in place, do not un-secure and leave your area until you have visual or audible confirmation by a police officer or supervisor that is safe to come out.

A. True
B. False
17. Staff may be called upon after the threat has been neutralized to help treat or moved injured persons.

A. True  
B. False

18. If you have sheltered in place, do not un-secure and leave your area until you have visual or audible confirmation by a police officer or supervisor that is safe to come out.

A. True  
B. False
19. It is not necessary for VA Medical Centers to coordinate and train with local police, since the VA Police are trained in Active Threat Response.

A. True
B. False

20. As with any other emergency situation, preparation greatly increases one’s likelihood of survival.

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