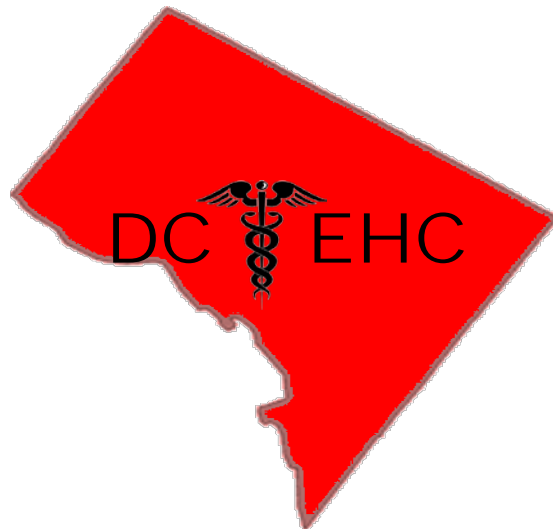# DC Emergency Healthcare Coalition

Public Information Functional Annex

DC Healthcare Coalition Public Information
Functional Annex

PURPOSE: This annex to the DC Emergency Healthcare Coalition (DCEHC) EOP provides guidance to Healthcare Coalition public information officers (PIOs) and/or their staff during a preplanned event or no-notice incident of significance to assist in providing timely, accurate, and consistent information to hospital personnel, external response partners (police, fire, EMS, public health, and emergency management), and the public. As a component of the DCEHC EOP, guidance provided in this document is intended to be executed within the framework described in the Base Plan document.

Other attachments to the DCEHC EOP may be utilized in conjunction with this document. As with any component of the DCEHC EOP, this tool is intended to provide guidance only and does not substitute for the experience of the personnel responsible for making decisions at the time of the incident.

Situation and Assumptions

Significant events and incidents of a health or medical nature create the need for response on the part of healthcare organizations' public information officers. This annex outlines activities coordinated through the DC Emergency Healthcare Coalition that are designed to promote consistency and completeness of effort. It is recognized that each individual healthcare organization has a need for a PIO function. This is primarily focused on activities within the organization itself. It is also recognized that the jurisdiction (DC) has a similar requirement and that these efforts are based in multiple different agencies focusing on their individual efforts.

Assumptions:

- Each organization has a public information responsibility to its own personnel and to the public at large.
- The public typically does not respond well to different health or medical messaging coming from various organizations.
- The DCEHC can be used to facilitate the coordination of healthcare organization PIO functions.

System Description

Healthcare Organization PIO: During incident response, healthcare organizations may elect to staff this position within their own Incident Management Team (IMT). This individual is responsible for:
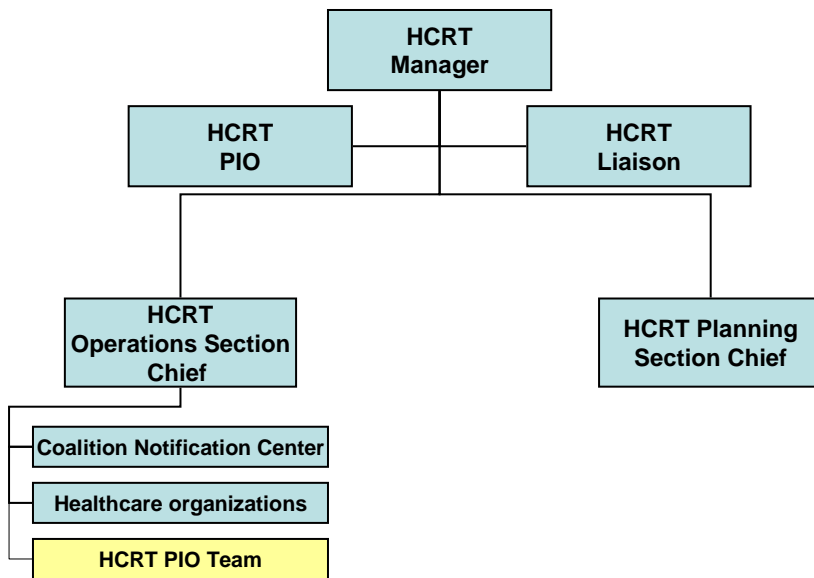- Keeping their respective IMT informed of public information related issues and participating, when appropriate, in the management decision making within their organization.
- Sharing designated/approved information with healthcare organization staff.
- Sharing approved information with the public using well developed and coordinated systems.
- Coordinating with external partners in executing their responsibilities.

Healthcare Coalition Response Team (HCRT) Public Information Officer: This position is staffed based upon the recommendations of the HCRT Manager and sits within the command staff of the HCRT. Per the DCEHC EOP Base Plan, this position:

- Manages media messages that deal directly with HCRT operations.
- Monitors the media for descriptions of the response performance of the DCEHC or its member organizations, noting rumors, misinformation, and reporting errors that should be addressed through HCRT action or referred to member organizations.
- Ensures that HCRT Operations Section convenes healthcare organization PIOs as a "Joint Information System" or JIS (usually virtually and as required) to promote consistency of message among healthcare organizations.
- It is expected that the workload of the HCRT PIO will seldom be a full time requirement, and that the HCRT PIO may be able to serve collaterally, while fulfilling most of their normal response duties for their home organization.

HCRT PIO Team Leader: This position is staffed based upon the recommendations of the HCRT Operations Section Chief. The HCRT PIO Team Leader role is staffed by one of the member organization's PIOs and they serve to facilitate HCRT teleconference calls held to focus on public information matters. In addition, the HCRT PIO Team Leader may work in conjunction with any established Joint Information Center.

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         ├─ Coalition Notification Center
         ├─ Healthcare organizations
         └─ HCRT PIO Team
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Concept of Operations

<u>Incident Recognition</u>

The need to coordinate healthcare organization public messaging can exist during any incident or event. The most frequent anticipated incident-type would be during response to a hazard impact with public health implications. The need for coordinated messaging can be recognized at an individual healthcare organization, by the HCRT, or by jurisdictional authorities. Any of these entities may request initiating the procedures outlined below.

<u>Initial notification/Activation</u>

The DC Emergency Healthcare Coalition (DCEHC) Duty Officer (early in an incident) or DCEHC Manager (after start up) may staff and activate a PIO Team as part of the responding HCRT. In addition, any of the healthcare organization PIOs or major jurisdictional agencies (e.g. Department of Health) may make a request to the HCRT to stand up a PIO Team during an incident. Finally, in unusual circumstances, the PIO Team may be indicated without a full HCRT response. The interested party should contact the DCEHC Duty Officer to initiate the process and at a minimum, a HCRT Manager will be staffed to support the PIO Team.

Initial notification of healthcare organization PIOs is conducted via-phone contact (see Master Personnel Communication Directory attachment to the Communication Annex or the document on the HIS) or use of the Health Alert Network (HAN). (See Communication Annex- HAN attachment)

<u>Mobilization</u>

The HCRT PIO Team will be comprised of all PIOs from member organizations that are interested in participating. The HCRT Operations Section will seek one PIO willing and able to serve as the HCRT PIO Team Leader.

Incident Operations:

The initial step for the HCRT PIO Team will typically be a teleconference facilitated by the HCRT PIO Team Leader. The general format for these initial teleconferences will be to identify:

- All participants on the call
- What is known about the incident thus far as it relates to public messaging
- PIO messaging needs (internal to organizations and to public)
- Need to coordinate messaging
- Timeline for next teleconference or other actions.

Throughout the course of incident response, several activities may be necessary and the indication for each will be established by the PIO Team Leader responding to the HCRT Operations Section Chief or the Team members concerns. If staffed, the HCRT PIO may participate in any of the listed activities:

- Maintaining coordination of PIOs

- Information sharing among PIOs will normally occur via e-mail and teleconferencing on a regular basis as the situation warrants. Video-conferencing will be used when needed and the technology is available.
- Contact information (Appendix A) will be utilized as a call down list or the HAN can be used to announce upcoming teleconferences.
- Conference calls will be facilitated by the HCRT PIO Team Leader. The teleconference bridge utilized by the PIO Team will be announced at the time of the message.
- The HCRT PIO Team may need to meet in person at select times during incident response to optimize discussions and work products. The location of the meeting(s) will be collectively determined (e.g. DCHA, a work space at one of the healthcare organization's facilities, etc.).

- Information developed for healthcare organization staff:
  - Messaging to healthcare organization staff will remain the primary responsibility of the relevant organizational PIO. However, there may be indications in which standardized, District-wide staff messaging within healthcare organizations could be important to prevent conflicting or inaccurate messaging. In these situations, the HCRT PIO Team will develop together a framework for the message and then each PIO will retain responsibility for incorporating additional details as appropriate for their organization.
  - As with any PIO action, the final message to be released internal to the organization is subject to the approval of the relevant healthcare organization Incident Commander.

- Information released to the public:
  - Messaging to the public will remain the primary responsibility of the relevant organizational PIO. However, there may be indications in which standardized, District-wide public messaging from healthcare organizations could be important to prevent conflicting or inaccurate messaging. In these situations, the HCRT PIO Team will develop together a framework for the message and then each PIO will retain responsibility for incorporating additional details as appropriate for their organization.
  - As with any PIO action, the final message to be released from the organization is subject to the approval of the relevant healthcare organization Incident Commander.
  - The HCRT PIO Team possesses the ability to conduct a joint press conference. This will be set up and managed by the HCRT PIO Team if all participants agree to:
    - Press conference format and timing
    - Press conference location
    - Press conference participants/speakers.
  - The HCRT PIO Team possesses the ability to post a joint statement on the internet. The information posted will be agreed to by all healthcare organization PIOs and the HCRT Manager. The actual site for posting the information will be established by the PIO Team and the media will be asked to publish information on how to access the web-site.

- Integration with the Joint Information System (JIS)/Joint Information Center (JIC):
  - The HCRT PIO Team will participate, as permitted, in the development and operation of a JIS/JIC in the District of Columbia and/or NCR.
  - Staff from the HCRT PIO Team will be assigned to a JIC, if requested/permitted by relevant authorities. The staffing of this position will be as available and will focus on attendance during important activities at the JIC (e.g. operations briefings).
  - At a minimum, one HCRT PIO Team member will be designated as the official representative to the JIC to provide ease of access to the HCRT.
  - The HCRT PIO Team will follow as appropriate any JIS policies and/or procedures pertaining to message development and delivery.

- Coordination with Maryland and Virginia Healthcare Organizations:
  - Generally this will be coordinated by the HCRT PIO and /or participation in the JIC

- [Monitoring of media messaging:
  - Each HCRT PIO Team member will be responsible for monitoring media messaging with regards to the medical and health sectors.
  - Any information obtained that is pertinent to the HCRT or an individual healthcare organization should be reported by the individual identifying it back to the HCRT PIO Team.
  - Significant errors or misrepresentations reported in the media should be reported to the PIO Team Leader in real time so that a response may be developed.

Demobilization

- The HCRT PIO Team is demobilized as soon as the need for its actions are no longer needed. It may be reconstituted during an incident if needed. The decision to demobilize the HCRT PIO Team is typically that of the HCRT Manager with input from the Team itself. An announcement relevant to the demobilization of the HCRT PIO Team will be sent to all of its members through email, phone contact and/or the HAN.

- Any individual healthcare organization PIO may elect to stop participation in the HCRT PIO Team before Team demobilization. This individual is responsible for informing the HCRT PIO Team Leader as soon as this decision has been made.

- When the HCRT PIO Team is demobilizing, there may be the need to notify other entities such as the JIC – if established (notification by the HCRT PIO Team) or select jurisdictional agencies (notification by the appropriate HCRT personnel).

Transition to Recovery

- As soon as feasible post-incident, HCRT PIO Team members should document items for any relevant After Action Report process. The HCRT PIO Team members may elect to develop a formal AAR for consideration by the Coalition's EMC. This effort shall follow protocol as established by the EMC.