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Disaster Infrastructure Lessons Learned
Q&A Offers Insights from Moore, Oklahoma

CHICAGO – Sept. 30, 2013 – Moore Medical Center (MMC), a 45-bed community hospital in Moore, OK, affiliated with the Norman Regional Health System, had been working to implement health information technology and participating in statewide health information exchange (HIE). The importance of this effort became clear when a devastating tornado destroyed the facility on May 20, 2013.

“The disaster heightened the awareness of how critical disaster preparedness is, how important it will be if your community suffers such a catastrophic event where your health facilities are heavily damaged or even destroyed, as was the case in Moore,” says John Meharg, director of health information technology at MMC, in “Meaningful Use and Disaster Infrastructure Q&A,” in the October issue of the Journal of AHIMA.

“We’ve learned from the experience of our members who are affected by disasters that information is a lifesaver,” said AHIMA CEO Lynne Thomas Gordon, MBA, RHIA, FACHE, CAE, FAHIMA. “AHIMA is committed to a future in which health information is available where and when it’s needed.”

The article offers advice and lessons learned:

- Internet access is critical. Develop a plan for access should your Internet access be severed, as was the case for six hours in Moore. Understand what backup plans and redundancies your internet service provider has in place.
- In the aftermath of the tornado, MMC was able to access patient records online. This eliminated delays and the need for requesting hard copies. In MMC’s case, the HIE was available for physicians to access patients’ past medical histories, even if patients were not taken to their normal healthcare facility or system.
- In addition to prudent disaster planning, have a game plan to make sure charts are scanned faster than normal upon the threat of severe weather. This ensures the online availability of as much patient information as possible.
- Know the exact location of documents, forms, and charts in each building in a health system, so that employees going into different buildings can work quickly in the aftermath of a disaster.
Once charts have been scanned and electronically logged, make sure you know specifically where and when they are stored, whether at an on-site or off-site location. This helped the MMC staff determine what information was missing after the tornado.

Also in this issue

The October issue of the Journal of AHIMA also includes:

- “Meaningful Use Opens Up Its Deep End” takes a look at how providers are doing attesting to Meaningful Use stage 1 and ensuring a smooth transition to stage 2.
- A new practice brief addresses the primary challenge in receiving unsolicited health information, followed by key recommendations to help manage it.

Read these articles and more in the October issue of the Journal of AHIMA or online at journal.ahima.org.

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