

Ebola Disease Table Top Exercise **After Action Review**

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On December 16, 2014, members of the University's Public Health Committee and others from departments across the University of West Florida campus gathered for a table top exercise to test the emergency response plans, policies, and procedures as they pertain to a possible Ebola infection incident on campus. The departments involved included the Dean of Students Office, Student Health Services, Wellness Services, Health and Psychological Services, Housing and Residence Life, University Communications, Environmental Health and Safety, the Center on Aging, International Education and Programs, Student Disability Resource Center, Department of Nursing, and Clinical Laboratory Sciences. To ensure the exercise was effective and to provide a third party evaluation of both the exercise and the quality of the Universities procedures, Mr. Eric Gilmore the Regional Emergency Response Advisor for Florida Region 1, Aric Porter, and David Chmiel (Epidemiologist) of the Florida Department of Health (DOH) agreed to act as official observers and evaluators of what we did well and what might need improvement. Additionally, Mr. Mr. Elton Gilmore from the Escambia County Office of Emergency Management also served as an evaluator. In addition to acting as evaluators they also participated and shared their incites regarding effective actions and responses to the exercise scenario.

Epidemics have major implications for Universities regardless of whether the epidemic begins on campus or is brought to campus from outside. A university is expected to provide a safe environment for students who may have traveled here from other parts of the globe. In the event of an epidemic, many students may be unable to return home due to distance issues. Additionally, faculty traveling to foreign areas where an epidemic outbreak is occurring may unknowingly become infected and spread the virus to the campus community after they return. Staffs are trusted with the need to keep the campus functioning but the illness and absenteeism of co-workers caused by an epidemic may hinder their ability to keep the University functioning. Epidemics can have a major effect on all aspects of campus life and every department, as it was discovered during the H1N1 Pandemic in the Fall of 2009. It is with these concerns in mind the UWF Public Health Committee in conjunction with other campus departments held a table top exercise to practice the coordination and communication activities in an Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) scenario impacting the UWF campus community.

The Table Top Exercise began with an overview of the history of recent Ebola epidemics. Particular emphasis was placed on the current Ebola epidemic occurring in West Africa. The group was then briefed on the guidelines, assumptions and artificialities for the exercise.

The Exercise was broken up into modules based on the expected progressive stages of a case of Ebola happening on the UWF Campus. Below is a description for each of the modules, the key issues and a list of the strengths and weaknesses which were brought out during the exercise discussions.

Module 1 – “Initial Case” – Discussion were held regarding a number of key issues which would need to be addressed when a student on campus, Michael, contracted Ebola after visiting family in West Africa. Some of those key issues were:

1. What protocols or procedures would need to be implemented?
2. How to handle the situation if the student had been socially very active since his return.
3. Who should be notified at UWF?
4. What assistance should be requested from outside agencies?

Strengths:

- a. Student Health Services (SHS) has updated protocols regarding procedures to follow for potential ebola patients and collecting contact information of persons in SHS at the time.
- b. EH&S working with International Programs to identify students traveling to ebola infected countries.
- c. University Communications has pre-drafted ebola email messages.
- d. Good community partnerships are in place.
- e. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) has been identified, purchased and trained on.

Areas for Improvement:

- a. Plan for initial notifications to University Administration needs improvement.
- b. Plans regarding how to handle mass withdrawals and demand for tuition reimbursements due to concerns of infection need improvement.
- c. Discovered there is no contractor in State available for decontamination of possibly contaminated spaces.
- d. Need to coordinate with DOH Public Information Officer (PIO) in order to set up a Joint Information Center (JIC) to handle media requests due to the regional implications.

Module 2 - “Expanding Situation” – Discussions were held regarding how to handle issues related to Michael’s roommates, friends and the campus community especially after it is learned Michael has died from the Ebola virus. Additionally, discussions were held regarding the expected influx of media to campus. Some key issues for Module 2 were:

1. What protective measures should Michael’s roommates and others who have come in contact with him take?
2. How will the University manage the aftermath of Michael’s death?
3. How will UWF handle the needs of the media?

Strengths:

- a. Dean of Students Office has plans for student death notifications.
- b. University Marketing has plans and protocols for handling media and surge of information requests.
- c. University Communications will monitor Social Media 24/7.
- d. Counseling and Psychological Services has plans in place for providing assistance to grieving and concerned students.

Needs Improvement:

- a. Issue related to handling isolation of exposed students need improvement both at SHS and Housing. DOH is currently attempting to create isolation area off campus to house students for isolation.
- b. Protocols are needed regarding issues of campus closure. Protocols need to be coordinated through DOH.
- c. Protocols need to be in place to assure that should an event take place, DOH has immediate access to rosters for residence halls occupants, class lists and class schedules of students of concern.

Module 3 – “Recovery” – As the situation regarding the concern of a possible Ebola epidemic on campus begins to subside, the group was asked to provide their anticipated actions to bring the campus back to normal operations. Some key issues addressed were:

- 1. How will the transition from isolation back to the general population be handled for Michael’s roommates?
- 2. How will the fact that the situation is returning to normal be communicated?
- 3. How will the resolution of the situation be communicated externally and internally?

Strengths:

- a. Reintegration of isolated students will be facilitated by notifications from University Marketing and through Housing communications with residence hall occupants.
- b. University Marketing will, both internally and externally, ensure notification the situation has been resolved by use of all available media outlets.

Needs Improvement:

- a. Student Health Center need to evaluate their existing plan to handle the potential influx of patients related to the “Worried well”.

Issues identified as needing improvement will be addressed by June 30, 2015.