

Keeping patients and staff safe in an emergency

Hands-on practice for Codes Black and Green

By Menah Song

Toronto East General Hospital (TEGH) is offering hands-on training sessions about the safest methods for staff and patients during a possible Code Black (bomb threat) and Code Green (evacuation) emergency situation. Over 500 TEGH staff, physicians and students participated in mock drills led by the Emergency Procedures Committee (EPC) on June 3rd and 10th. The drills were done at a very low cost using a vacant patient care unit, members of the EPC to conduct the drills and supplies that the hospital had on hand.

The drills began with a lesson and Q&A session where attendees were able to discuss concerns regarding the possibility of a real-life situation. This was led by EPC chair, Clint Hodges, who kept staff engaged and attentive with



Toronto East General Hospital staff practice a vertical evacuation, using an emergency evacuation mat with a life-sized doll as a patient. Photo credit: Kevin Holm

his passion. Following the lesson, staff participated in a search for a 'potential threat' in accordance with the Code Black stages. Each employee searched multiple rooms for suspicious-looking objects and followed the proper procedures on reporting it. The drills were held every 15 minutes from 8 a.m.-4 p.m.,

with no interference of daily routines or schedules.

Emergency evacuation markers that are placed on the outside of each door to inform staff and emergency response personnel, that the room has been checked and is clear from potential threats, were explained to staff members. The importance of using any

visible marker to indicate an empty room was emphasized to employees to ensure the safety of everyone in the hospital during a real Code Black or Green situation.

TEGH employees were shown the safest ways to evacuate non-ambulatory patients to the closest exit when a Code Green is announced. A life-size doll, weighing approximately 75lbs, was used to demonstrate. Participants were given the opportunity to move the doll from the patient's bed to the hallway and then down the stairs using an evacuation mat. During the exercise employees were coached on how to safely use body mechanics when handling a patient.

Many employees found this exercise to be very useful, informative and appreciated that it only took 30 minutes and was offered throughout the day to suit the many busy

schedules.

"I thought it was very effective and really put things in perspective," says Barley Chironda, Organization Safety Specialist. "It really helped ease my anxiety. I've thought before, 'what would I do', but now I know."

The EPC did not have to recreate or stage an area in the hospital. A vacant patient care wing was used with little set-up or take-down. By doing so, participants were able to act-out the situations right in the hospital and understand appropriate evacuation exits.

Additional drills are planned for the near future, which will also allow more staff working evening and night shifts to participate in the training.

Menah Song works in Corporate Communications at Toronto East General Hospital.