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**Protecting
our patients,
employees, and
communities**

an interview with
Lloyd Dean



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by Nancy J. Beckley

Paging...paging... What's old is new!

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It sort of started when several providers were looking for secure and encrypted texting solutions to communicate messages about patients throughout the treatment day. Then another provider was instructed



Beckley

by a referring physician group that they would be communicating with providers by texts rather than emails or faxes, so they needed a recommendation on a secure texting solution. Texting options have been discussed on HCCAnet—a great place to get feedback from providers of all types and sizes on their choice of texting options, with continued capabilities of smartphones and other devices.

In a bit of serendipity, I was analyzing alternative communication methods required under the CMS Emergency Preparedness Rule, effective 11/15/2017 for several providers. Hypothetically, in a disaster, normal landline communications could be taken out of service and cell towers could be damaged, leaving no ability to make cellphone calls or text; and if electricity is out, desktop computers would be useless for email. Providers from home health agencies, hospitals, outpatient therapy clinics, and skilled nursing facilities were seeking advice on the right “alternative” communication method, based on the identified emergency/disaster risk identified in their hazard vulnerability risk assessment. One

provider reported their fingers were crossed, hoping the purchase order for satellite phones would be approved. Other providers headed to the local home improvement and “big box” stores to purchase walkie talkies to fill the alternative communication requirement.

Just when I was putting the finishing touches on an Emergency Preparedness workbook, the email popped up on my screen with the subject line “Why do physicians still use pagers?” Pagers? Seriously? Maybe I was so caught up in social media that I missed the fact that pagers survived the smartphone revolution. Intrigued, I connected to the blog post by Spok,¹ a technology company specializing in healthcare communications. It may surprise you to know some of the pager facts that were reviewed in the blog post, but what stood out to me was the statement related to my topic at hand (emergency preparedness). According to Spok: “A plethora of capabilities also give pagers the edge in emergency situations. Powered by AA batteries, pagers operate even if the power goes out and Wi-Fi/cellular networks are completely overwhelmed.”

In addition to nicely fitting into emergency preparedness communication alternatives, pagers are convenient, cost effective, and now available with encryption capabilities. What more could you ask for? Paging, paging... paging compliance. 📞

Since this article was written CMS has clarified texting:
<http://go.cms.gov/2mfEWaG>

1. <http://bit.ly/2DmArIE>