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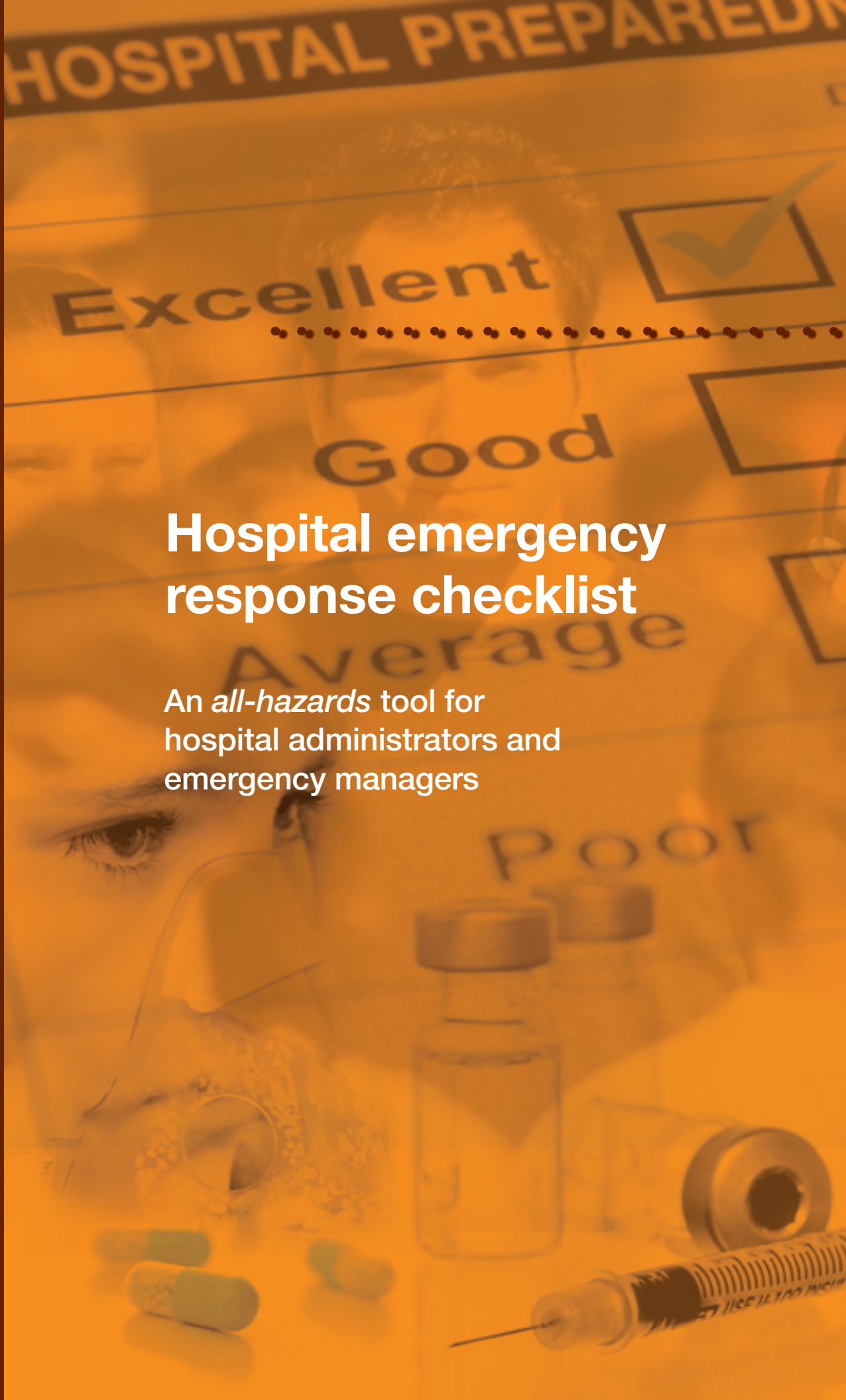

Hospital emergency response checklist

An *all-hazards* tool for hospital administrators and emergency managers

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Abstract

Hospitals play a critical role in providing communities with essential medical care during all types of disaster. Depending on their scope and nature, disasters can lead to a rapidly increasing service demand that can overwhelm the functional capacity and safety of hospitals and the health-care system at large. The World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe has developed the *Hospital emergency response checklist* to assist hospital administrators and emergency managers in responding effectively to the most likely disaster scenarios. This tool comprises current hospital-based emergency management principles and best practices and integrates priority action required for rapid, effective response to a critical event based on an all-hazards approach. The tool is structured according to nine key components, each with a list of priority action to support hospital managers and emergency planners in achieving: (1) continuity of essential services; (2) well-coordinated implementation of hospital operations at every level; (3) clear and accurate internal and external communication; (4) swift adaptation to increased demands; (5) the effective use of scarce resources; and (6) a safe environment for health-care workers. References to selected supplemental tools, guidelines and other applicable resources are provided. The principles and recommendations included in this tool may be used by hospitals at any level of emergency preparedness. The checklist is intended to complement existing multisectoral hospital emergency management plans and, when possible, augment standard operating procedures during non-crisis situations.

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Keywords

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Contents

Page

Main authors **6**

Glossary **7**

Introduction **9**

Key component 1. Command and control 10

Key component 2. Communication 12

Key component 3. Safety and security 13

Key component 4. Triage 14

Key component 5. Surge capacity 15

Key component 6. Continuity of essential services 16

Key component 7. Human resources 17

Key component 8. Logistics and supply management 19

Key component 9. Post-disaster recovery 20

References **21**

Recommended reading **22**

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Glossary

Capacity
The combination of all the strengths, attributes and resources available within an organization that can be used to achieve agreed goals *(1)*.

Command and control
The decision-making system responsible for activating, coordinating, implementing, adapting and terminating a pre-established response plan *(2)*.

Contingency planning
A process that analyses potential events or emerging situations that might threaten society or the environment and establishes arrangements that would enable a timely, effective and appropriate response to such events should they occur. The events may be specific, categorical, or all-hazard. Contingency planning results in organized and coordinated courses of action with clearly identified institutional roles and resources, information processes and operational arrangements for specific individuals, groups or departments in times of need *(1).*

Critical event
Any event in connection with which a hospital finds itself unable to deliver care in the customary fashion or to an accepted standard, event resulting in a mismatch of supply (capacity, resources, infrastructure) and demand (patients), and requiring the hospital to activate contingency measures to meet demand.

Disaster
Any event or series of events causing a serious disruption of a community's infrastructure – often associated with widespread human, material, economic, or environmental loss and impact, the extent of which exceeds the ability of the affected community to mitigate using existing resources *(1)*.

Emergency
A sudden and usually unforeseen event that calls for immediate measures to mitigate impact *(3).*

Emergency response plan
A set of written procedures that guide emergency actions, facilitate recovery efforts and reduce the impact of an emergency event.

Incident action plan
A document that guides operational activities of the Incident Command System during the response phase to a particular incident. The document contains the overall incident objectives and strategy, general tactical actions, and supporting information to enable successful completion of objectives *(4).*

Incident command group
A multidisciplinary body of the incident command system, which provides the overall technical leadership and oversight for all aspects of crisis management, coordinates the overall response, approves all action, response and mitigation plans, and serves as an authority on all activities and decisions.

Incident command system
The designated system of command and control, which includes a combination of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and means of communication, operating within a common organizational structure designed to aid in the management of resources for emergency incidents *(4).*

Memorandum of understanding
A formal document embodying the firm commitment of two or more parties to an undertaking; it sets out the general principles of the commitment but falls short of constituting a detailed contract or agreement *(5).*

Mutual-aid agreement
An agreement between agencies, organizations and jurisdictions, which provides a mechanism whereby emergency assistance in the form of personnel, equipment, materials and other associated services can be obtained quickly. The primary objective of the agreement is to facilitate the rapid, short-term deployment of emergency support prior to, during and after an incident *(6).*

Policy
A formally advocated statement or understanding adopted to direct a course of action, including planning, command and control, preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery *(7).*

Preparedness
The knowledge and capacities developed by governments, professional response and recovery organizations, communities and individuals to effectively anticipate, respond to and recover from the impacts of likely, imminent, or current hazardous events or conditions *(1).*

Recovery
Restoring or improving the functions of a facility affected by a critical event or disaster through decisions and action taken after the event *(8).*

Resources
The personnel, finances, facilities and major equipment and supply items available or potentially available for assignment to incident operations.

Response
The provision of emergency services and public assistance during or immediately after a disaster in order to save lives, reduce health impacts, ensure public safety, and meet the basic subsistence needs of the people affected *(1).*

Risk assessment
A methodology for determining the nature and extent of risk, which involves analysing potential hazards and evaluating their impact in the context of existing conditions of vulnerability that, together, could harm exposed people, property, services, livelihoods, and the environment on which they depend *(1).*

Standard operating procedure
A complete reference document or operations manual that describes the purpose of a preferred method of performing a single function or a number of interrelated functions in a uniform manner and provides information about the dura

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