

Hospital Radio Teams: What's happening in California and in Houston

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Sources for Parts 1 and 2: HDSCS.org and KPARN.org

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PART 1: How Often Do Hospitals Need Hams?

From: HDSCS.org, the Hospital Disaster Support Communication System, a specialized unit of ARES, formed in 1980 in Orange County, California.

Southern California has its share of earthquakes, floods, and fires. Backup communications are vital, whether the disaster is an area-wide earthquake or a failure in the hospital's own telephone switchboard. Patients can be at risk in either case.

Thanks to pre-planning and alerting procedures, hospitals in Orange County, California know how to quickly activate Amateur Radio communications support. Here are some **statistics** that show why Amateur Radio backup of communications is a real need for hospitals.

- **32 hospitals** and health care facilities in Orange County have agreements with HDSCS for backup communications support. This includes 100% of the acute-care receiving hospitals in the county.
- Since 1980, HDSCS has activated for the following:
 - **124 communications failure responses** (due to phone outages, earthquakes, firestorms, etc.)
 - **123 on-site standby operations** (pre-planned and short-notice phone/communications system repairs and cutovers)
 - **209 operating drills**, mostly at hospitals and other agencies.
- There was **one communications-failure callout in 2016 as well as one emergency alert. There has been one communications-failure callout and one emergency alert so far in 2017.**
- About 78% of our emergency callouts have been "isolated" telephone system outages such as switchgear failures and accidentally cut cables. The rest have

been communication disruptions due to area-wide perils such as hazardous material release, power failures, earthquakes, firestorms, and flooding.

- The average duration of an HDSCS emergency activation is four hours, but some have lasted for 24 hours or more.
- An average emergency activation or standby operation requires eleven HDSCS communicators.

Here is information about two of the more recent activations of HDSCS:

Emergency Activation #123: At 1:17 PM on December 12, 2016, HDSCS was contacted by Anaheim Global Medical Center. **A complete failure had occurred in the hospital's telephone system and communications assistance, both internal and external, was needed.** HDSCS activated four members who set up in the Command Center, using the hospital's external antenna, and provided voice communications to critical units within the hospital. They also established an outside link at a base station. Although some phones were up within an hour, the system was not fully functional, so the hospital continued to keep its Command Center activated and to follow Hospital Incident Command procedures.

Emergency Activation #124: HDSCS was activated at 3:25 AM on March 17, 2017. **All internal and external telephones were down at UCI Medical Center in Orange.** Five HDSCS members responded, with the first arriving at 4:30, setting up his radio equipment in the Hospital Command Center. Fortunately, telephones came up at about 5 AM, but the HCC remained open and HDSCS remained on site until 7 AM as functionality and reliability of the system was determined.

PART 2: The Kaiser Permanente Amateur Radio Network, KPARN

KPARN MISSION STATEMENT: The Kaiser Permanente Amateur Radio Network (KPARN) is an organization of FCC-licensed amateur radio operators who volunteer time and technical expertise to support the emergency preparedness mission of Kaiser Permanente Health System through redundant communications technologies.

KPARN is a component of the Southern California Regional Emergency Preparedness Program. It currently supports fifteen KP medical centers and several regional facilities including the Southern California Regional Command Center (RCC). These

facilities stretch from the U.S. - Mexico Border to Bakersfield covering an area larger than the State of Indiana over six counties.

KPARN radio operators participate with other hospitals, California State agencies, county health departments and local governments in simulated emergency exercises and/or drills for emergency preparedness. These exercises test KPARN equipment, and its methods and technical and operational aspects of providing necessary regional healthcare emergency communication.

KPARN volunteer radio operators receive mandatory emergency preparedness, general healthcare and hospital specific orientation prior to being assigned to support a specific KP Medical Center. Additional periodic technical and healthcare related training is provided to maintain the KPARN radio operator communications competency.

PART 3: Hospital Radio Teams in Houston

- **Memorial Hermann - Memorial City Hospital** - The groundwork for hospital radio teams in Houston began in 2005, in the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, when the federal government established grants to equip hospitals so that there could be ham radio teams. Mike Hardwick, N5VCX, began a group called Hams for Hospitals.

One of the first drills for Houston hospital radio teams was held in the spring of 2006. Dave Wells, KD5E, operated mobile from the roof of the parking garage at Memorial Hermann - Memorial City Hospital. By 2008, the hospital had antennas installed on the roof, and a room inside the main building from which to operate the radios, which, along with the antennas, had been funded by a grant. When Hurricane Ike hit Houston in 2008, the Memorial Hermann - Memorial City Hospital radio room was manned by Bob Duer, N5YKX (now N6YKX), Al Vacek, KN5A; and Dave, KD5E.

The MH-MC Hospital Radio Team continues to meet monthly, and hosts an area-wide hospital radio net in conjunction with each meeting.

- **TEXAS CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL** - *Report by Linda Kangas, W5LDK*

The Texas Children's Hospital Amateur Radio team has followed a somewhat similar path as Memorial Hermann – Memorial City Hospital. The construction of our Main

Campus radio tower and initial purchase of equipment happened in the last half of 2006 using federal government grants post Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Two of the key ham amateur operators involved in this project were Ron Robb, N5KGC, and Dave Paperman, W5WP. I apologize if I have overlooked giving anyone credit having only arrived in Houston in 2015.

Our West Campus was opened in 2010 and the Woodlands Campus opened in 2016. All three of our campus Amateur Radio rooms with full HF and UHF/VHF voice and digital capabilities.

Our Team reports up to the Emergency Management group. We strive to have a formal quarterly meeting and usually have a project going on at one or more of the campuses each month or so.

We appreciate being able to check in with the Memorial Hermann Memorial City area-wide hospital radio net each month. We also work with the Red Cross radio team in testing our equipment and capabilities. Getting to know and respond with each other, as well as having volunteer opportunities on our teams, improves our ability to respond in a disaster.