COVID-19 Decision Insight

Issue: COVID-19 and Addressing Employee Wellness and Duty of Care Responsibilities

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Where this issue fits in the phases of the pandemic: Hot spots, flare ups, next waves

Summary: Security leaders and other stakeholders can have a positive impact on employees and the workplace by considering and implementing techniques designed to create trust and calm during these challenging times.

The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has caused a recent medical and emotional crisis, marked by an increased fear and anxiety throughout the world. Many people are required to halt their usual activities while others, those considered essential workers, are required to work under challenging conditions. We all find ourselves in search of food, cleaning supplies, paper products, and protective gear while trying to assist loved ones and friends, near and far. For those living with mental or physical health issues, this can be a particularly stressful time.

In many cases, we are prohibited from, or unable to, tend to friends, neighbors, and elders. In other cases, essential workers must assist those in need and risk being exposed to the virus. Many are concerned about their jobs and income, worrying about how they can afford to comply with stay at home orders and pay bills for likely several more weeks. Many households are suddenly facing economic uncertainty and hardship. Of concern per U.S. Law Enforcement and the United Nations is the sharp increase in domestic violence. Now is the time to contemplate and implement measures that can positively impact employee and family wellness now, and/or when business resumes.

This pandemic, like other crisis events, will eventually dissipate over time. However, mental and physical health issues will likely linger-on well into the future. It is therefore critical that security leaders and other stakeholders consider their Duty of Care responsibilities, if not done already:

- Devise a thorough plan with the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to evaluate the wellness of all employees deemed essential who have been working throughout this pandemic. The impact of the challenges and stressors for these employees should be evaluated so the company can fully meet their responsibilities.
- Provide updates regarding health care plans, e.g., allowing virtual appointments and other relevant changes.
- Reach out to employees weekly to remind them of the available benefits for themselves and family members via the EAP. Encourage employees to program the company's EAP phone number into their cell phones for easy access.
- EAP providers typically prepare quarterly metrics for their HR contacts. Threat assessment teams may benefit from seeing non-HIPPA related data pertaining to calls to understand and stay ahead of trends that may intersect with their roles to help maintain wellness and a safer workplace.
- Provide employees local/state mental wellness resources for family members to use 24x7 in a format they can post in their homes.
- Managers should schedule regular, recurring calls with their team members to get personal and professional status updates and take time to remind employees about EAP resources available to them and their family.
- Managers could encourage staff to think of ways to safely help their communities, thus improving their sense of purpose and human connection.
- Develop telecommuting policies and procedures. Provide quarantine guidelines that can decrease employees' concerns about the potential spreading of the virus while enabling a workforce to operate remotely.

- If a reduction of force is planned, consider providing health care benefits for an extended period of time. Carefully monitor any preexisting circumstances that might be particularly difficult for impacted employees. Devise thoroughly coordinated plans for any known or suspected at-risk cases.
- Anticipate the potential increase in work disruption resulting from the pandemic; expect there could be a possible rise in workplace violence cases.
- Encourage open communication regarding any concerns employees may have about the well-being of themselves and their colleagues.

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