TOPIC FOR TUESDAY, AUGUST 27, 2019:

How will the Mohawk Valley Health System (MVHS) plan for potential disasters like floods, fires and other potential natural and man-made disasters at the new regional medical center? Will it be more difficult than at the existing campus locations?

Disasters are a fact of life and MVHS, like hospitals nationwide, have professionals on staff who are dedicated to emergency preparedness plans and preparations for these situations. We, like other healthcare facilities, have plans in place, conduct drills for any number of potential disasters and train our staff members on a regular basis to ensure that we are prepared. These plans include procedures for ensuring continued care for patients, potential evacuation of patients, sheltering in place, tracking patients and staff during an emergency and being prepared to take care of community members affected by the situation.

And, we don’t do this alone. Our plans and training are done in cooperation with state, regional, county and city agencies like public health departments, fire and police departments, first responders and emergency management systems as well as other hospitals in our region. In fact, just last week, MVHS participated in a drill with Utica College, police and fire departments and medical helicopter transport through LifeNet. We conduct at least three to four hospital-initiated drills each year and participate in many other community-wide emergency preparedness drills.

MVHS emergency preparedness plans adhere to federal guidelines and requirements and we also learn from our colleagues throughout the state and nation. Hospitals that experienced events such as Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy learned a great deal and have been sharing their lessons with others.

The development of disaster preparedness plans and training for any number of potential situations are a key part of the move to the new regional medical center in Downtown Utica. Given the new location and building, we will be conducting a hazard risk assessment and ensuring that our plans, policies and procedures address any additional or different priority risks. In relation to the new medical center, we have heard concerns expressed about potential flooding, fires and how and where we would evacuate patients. Our plans address all of these situations and we have agreements in place with other hospitals in our region in the case of an evacuation, as they do with us.

Both natural and man-made disasters, by their nature, are unpredictable. But, MVHS maintains our strong commitment to be prepared for all eventualities to the best of our ability, and we will continue to update our plans, conduct drills and train our staff to do all that we can to protect patients, employees, volunteers and medical staff members and to be ready to take care of our community members during a disaster.