

# Ragan Crisis Communications Conference

**Strategy and Response Workshop**

# Basics and Background

Health care communications:

- Highly regulated environment
- Cannot share any information about patients without their consent

Ebola basics:

- High mortality rate
- Contagious only through direct contact with bodily fluids of a symptomatic person – not airborne



# Basics and Background

This scenario is largely **fictional**.

Certain elements of it are inspired by issues that arose in real-world situations and in our training and planning.



# The Workshop Scenario

- Your hospital has successfully treated a number of very high-profile Ebola patients
- There are rumors that another patient may soon be on the way
- You DO NOT have confirmation from authorities that another patient is going to be transported
- There is still some public and internal concern about the presence of a notorious virus in the community



# The Workshop Scenario

- DISRUPTION:
  - A news outlet reports confirmation that the next patient is coming

How do you change your plan?



# The Workshop Scenario

- DISRUPTION:
  - During an interview on a different subject, a physician indicates another Ebola patient will be treated at your hospital
  - There is still no official confirmation from the authorities

How do you change your plan?



# The Workshop Scenario

- DISRUPTION:
  - A respected health reporter from a respected national publication calls: she has all the details you have and then some
  - She asks for confirmation without attribution **and** a first on-the-record comment when the situation changes

Do you change your plan?



# The Workshop Scenario

- DISRUPTION:
  - A tweet showing the inside of an airplane appears from a person claiming to be on their way to the U.S. for Ebola treatment
  - There is still no official confirmation from the authorities

How do you change your plan?





# The Workshop Scenario

- Status Update:
  - We receive confirmation that a patient is on the way to our facility

Does your plan change?



# The Workshop Scenario

- DISRUPTION:
  - Rumors circulate online that a staff member has started showing symptoms
  - The rumor is confirmed **false**: no member of the team is ill
  - The question is raised at an internal staff forum: “Is it safe for me to come to work?”

Adjustments?



# The Workshop Scenario

- DISRUPTION:
  - Reputable news sources begin reporting the social media rumor about staff symptoms

How do you change your plan?



# The Workshop Scenario

The elements of truth:

- Premature rumors of patient confirmation
- Physician asked about status during off-topic interviews
- Rumors reported as news



# The Workshop Scenario

## The real story:

*Nebraska Medicine colleagues,  
You may be hearing news reports that another Ebola patient bound for our Biocontainment Unit. While possible, at this point, it is not confirmed ... If we have confirmation of a patient heading to our facility, we will share what information we can with you. In the meantime, our organization stands ready.*

## *News release:*

*...As with previous patients we've treated here in recent months, per State Department regulations, we would only have confirmation when a plane is en route with a patient aboard. This is not the case right now.*



