HOSTAGE AND CRISIS NEGOTIATIONS IN MEDICAL FACILITIES:

IMPLICATIONS FOR MEDICAL PERSONNEL

By

James L. Greenstone, Ed.D., J.D., DABECI

Abstract

This article will provide a practical overview of suggested procedures to be followed by medical personnel in those instances when hostage or crisis situations occur in a medical facility such as, but not limited to, an emergency room or medical office. In such situations, also it will be important for all medical personnel to know how to interact appropriately with police, SWAT and hostage negotiators. At the conclusion of perusing this article, the reader should:

1. Know how to provide needed assistance during a hostage situation.
2. Understand how to assist hostage negotiators.
3. Have some knowledge of basic hostage negotiation procedures.
4. Address some of the medical needs of extended deployments.
5. Facilitate the transfer of medical care as needed and as appropriate.

Historical Perspective

Efforts to negotiate disputes between people probably date back to early mankind. Formal attempts at Crisis Intervention can be found early in the 20th Century. Modern hostage negotiations techniques date to the 1970’s. Captain Frank Bolz of the New York City Police Department generally is credited with developing many of the procedures utilized today. In part, his ideas for better ways to solve difficult crisis situations stemmed from his experiences at the Munich Olympics in 1972. When he returned to the United States, he set in motion the
beginnings of what we know today as police hostage and crisis negotiations. Perfected by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and others working in this field, the practices for resolving these types of situations have been tested and perfected. While there may be much work yet to be done to further develop the system, the success rate of hostage and crisis negotiations, when allowed to function, approaches very close to 100%.

**Philosophy**

Our goal as crisis interveners and hostage negotiators is to save life. This includes all of the parties to the incident. It includes good-guys, bad-guys, bystanders, hostages and anyone else affected. Life is the issue, and saving it is our guiding principle.

1. If you can negotiate, then negotiate.
2. Do not be too quick to conclude that negotiation is not possible. Keep trying.
3. In deciding to negotiate, liability issues are always present. Maybe that is a good reason to record all negotiations.
4. Only negotiate for as long as a life is worth.
5. Hostage and crisis negotiations is not a “wait and see” option.
6. Negotiations are an intensive, highly skilled dimension of police work.
7. Success rates in hostage and crisis negotiations are extremely high nationwide.
8. Strive to know when negotiations will not work. Do not jump to this conclusion, evaluate your situation.
9. When asked if negotiations are working, be prepared to provide informed and educated answers. Some believe that a negotiator will argue to continue negotiating even if there is
little to support his or her position. Most negotiators are not trained this way. It is important that you know your craft very well and are able to convey that you know that about which you are talking.

10. Recognize that negotiations and crisis intervention are tools. Tactical responses are tools also. Avoid seeing negotiators and SWAT as antagonistic. See each as tools that must be used separately or together at certain times to accomplish the overall goal. Using SWAT is not a failure for negotiators. Resolving a situation through negotiation is not a failure for SWAT. It takes both to get the job done.

**Negotiations are A Team Effort**

1. Take your time and work with each other.

2. Remember that you are working as a team.

3. Utilize all aspects of your team organization. Use the secondary negotiator, intelligence coordinator, think tank, coach, and others as needed and as assigned.

4. Support each other. Learn how to win together and to lose together.

5. Use time between contacts with the subject to update information, to generate fresh ideas, and to plan and goal-set.

6. Be involved in the problem, but avoid being part of the problem or overwhelmed by it.

7. Take care of each other. This is not a “filler,” nor is it not “cop like.” Do it.

8. Never trade weapons, drugs, people, release of prisoners or alcohol. If any exceptions to guidelines are to be considered, do it as a team.

10. Evaluate each demand for the needs expressed.

11. Search for reasons behind behavior.

12. Look for acceptable compromises.

13. Analyze each and every problem presented or determined.

14. Do not expect that the subject will be willing to give you all of the information that you need to know.

15. Look for the relationships that may exist between the hostage taker and the hostages.
   Consider relationships that may have existed pre-incident.

16. Document the entire scenario. Keep accurate and up-to-date records of everything that happens. Record what you do. Record what the subject and the hostages do. Write things down. You will not be able to remember all of the important details. This is important during the incident and may be important afterwards.

17. Make sure that all members of the team are managing their own experiences during the scenario and have what they need to sustain themselves.

   **Problem Solving**

Helping the subject to problem-solving may be one of the most important parts of the overall negotiations effort.

1. Imagine yourself in the other person’s situation.

2. Do not assume that you know the subject’s intentions.
3. Try to determine the degree to which your own biases are affecting your ability to understand the issues of the subject.

4. Do not blame the subject for their inability to cope.

5. Do not blame the subject for your issues.

6. Discuss each other’s perceptions.

7. Look for opportunities to act in ways that may be inconsistent with the way in which they see you.

8. Give the subject opportunities to be part of the solution to the present situation. Show how they have a stake in the outcome, both immediate and in their future.

9. Acknowledge the subject’s emotions.

10. Refrain from reacting to emotional outbursts.

11. If you first take time to understand the subject, the subject then may be able to better understand you and what is necessary to manage the situation.

12. Be concerned about the subject’s needs and interests. It is a powerful tool.

13. Remember that both sides will have multiple interests and that many of them will differ.

14. Strive to find common interests and then use them to the maximum extent possible.

15. Be concerned with trying to meet the needs of the subject. Whether or not you are actually able to meet those needs, the subject should always believe that you are trying to help in that regard.
When speaking of hostage negotiations, it is easy to assume that there is an all-encompassing, singular process called “negotiations.” Actually, what we casually refer to as hostage and crisis negotiations is really a series of steps. One of those steps in the process is the actual “negotiations” or bargaining. Other stages must have been resolved prior to the advent of actual negotiations in order for this stage to be successful. Additionally, there are stages that must be completed post-negotiations in order to insure ultimate success and crisis resolution.

These stages are not static. They may change as situations change. Additional steps may be required. Fewer steps may be used as appropriate. What is listed here should serve as a guide only.

Stage One: Pre-planning

Stage Two: Initial incident

Stage Three: Gathering intelligence

Stage Four: Establishing contact

Stage Five: Building rapport
Stage Six: Negotiations / Bargaining

Stage Seven: Problem solving

Stage Eight: Dealing with objections

Stage Nine: The surrender

Stage Ten: Debriefing

The Greenstone Model of Crisis Intervention

Immediacy. Action must be taken now.

Control. The negotiator or intervener must provide structure and support for the subject and for the situation.

Assessment. Often missed even by experienced interveners. You must know what it is that presents in front of you before you can make an effective decision about what to do.

Disposition. Once you know what you have, then you can do what is needed to resolve or to manage the incident: Negotiate or intervene in a crisis.

Referral. Sometimes help is needed beyond the initial intervention. If you have done the previous steps effectively, the possibility of a successful referral increases.

Follow-Up. This is probably the hardest step to follow. Time and other duties often prevent us from finding out what actually happened to the victim or hostage taker. One great benefit of the
follow-up is that it may provide significant information about the effectiveness of the intervention and provide material that can be duplicated in training.

You Have a Hostage Situation If You Have

1. *Substantive Demands*. These are demands directly related to the hostage taking. The hostage taker relates the taking of hostages to the fulfillment of certain conditions that are specified.

2. *A need to live on the part of the hostage taker*. If there is no need to live, you may have a different type of situation. Consider suicide.

3. *A perceived threat of force shown by the authorities*.

4. *Communications established between the hostage taker and the authorities*. Remember that “communications” can take many forms. Be alert for them.

5. *A leader among the hostage takers*. Without a leader, you may have chaos. Without a leader, you may have great difficulty negotiating an agreement. Always try to find a leader among the bad guys.

6. *Containment in the smallest possible area*. Why should they negotiate with us at all if they can come and go as they please or move freely about their stronghold.

7. *A negotiator that represents the authorities*, and yet continually expresses, both by word and deed, that he or she is willing to help.

8. *Time*. In a hostage situation, the longer the situation goes, the greater the likelihood that it will end successfully. The longer a situation goes in which no deaths occur, the greater the likelihood is that no deaths will occur. In a crisis situation, for example a barricaded
suicidal person, time may work against us. Timely contact is often imperative. Do not confuse the two issues.

Very, Very Basic Steps for Contact with the Hostage Taker

- Prepare your opening statement
- Ask the subject to come out early in the conversation
- If the subject will not come out early-on, ask again later
- Ignore the hostages, if you can
- Use cover, if needed
- Do not tell the subject, “No”
- Do not volunteer information to the subject
- Let the subject talk about whatever they want to talk about
- If lost for words, repeat the subject’s last statement or use the “pat” phrases
- Make the subject feel that he or she is important to you
- Note the subject’s demands. Write them down. Do not trivialize them
- Use the subject’s first name, if appropriate. Ask permission if you are not sure
- Let the subject talk. Try not to cut the subject off when he or she is speaking
- Listen carefully to what the subject says
- Never make promises that you cannot keep or do not intend to keep
- Do not evaluate the stated beliefs of the subject. That is the way they see things
- Let the subject know that you are trying to understand their point of view
- Accepting the subject’s point of view is not the same as agreeing with it
- Make the subject work for whatever he or she gets
Boards

Keeping track of what is going on, what has gone on, during negotiations is an important function of a negotiating team. Because situations may continue for a long time, the ability to call-up historical information may aid in the development of current plans and actions. The size of the team and the size of the scenario will often be a determining factor in how elaborate these information “boards” should be. Regardless, the information is valuable. To the degree that such records are developed and maintained effectively, to that extent will the information be of value to the negotiator and all involved. Often these records are maintained by a negotiator working in the intelligence area of the negotiations command post. They can also be maintained in the negotiations area depending on the needs of the team and of the incident.

Chronological – a complete record of the incident times and actions taken.
Positive police actions – what the police have done for the hostage taker.
Demands – substantive demands made by the subject.
Concessions – concessions made by police to the subject.
Weapons – possessed by the subject.
Surrender plan – developed by SWAT and Negotiators to avoid problems at resolution.
Weather – Current weather at the incident site and relevant forecasts.
Time check – correct time.
Profile Board – All information related to a specific hostage or hostage taker. One board per person.
Lies – lies told by the police.
Personnel – a listing of all police and related personnel working or scheduled to work the
Current incident.
Maps and plans.
Things “we” want to know.
Ready reference.
Tactical points.
Sickness monitoring.
Discussion points. (re: demands)

**Deadlines**

While deadlines can be difficult to deal with, and offer some uncertainty, in these situations, few
people die when deadlines are not met. It can happen, but because hostage situations do not
occur in a vacuum, there are real considerations for the hostage taker who kills a hostage.
Hostages are taken, and are needed, as shields and as ways of pushing out against the authorities.
Without the hostages taken, the taker reduces his or her negotiating power and the shield.
Deadlines should be considered within this context. The totality of the situation will help
determine the seriousness of a given deadline. Additionally, if hostages begin to die by the hand
of the hostage taker, usually negotiations will cease and the situation will become tactical. It may
even be necessary to remind the subject of this at appropriate times.

1. Do not be overly concerned about deadlines. Understand them within the context of the
situation at the time that the deadline is set.
2. The negotiator should be sure that he or she is on the phone or in contact with the subject as the deadline passes.

3. As the deadline passes, talk to the subject about things other than the deadline.

4. Talk the subject through the deadline by talking around it in some way. Bring up other areas of discussion.

5. Do not remind the subject that the deadline has passed.

6. If you can, make excuses about why the deadline cannot be met. Blame the problems on someone else, administration, the world situation, and the like.

7. Use the phrase, “I’m working on it,” as needed.

8. Do not represent to the hostage taker that you think that a deadline is a “big deal.”

9. The way in which you approach the hostage taker may encourage the subject to suspend their disbelief about the outcome of the incident. Your approach may focus them on the possibilities of getting what they need just long enough for you to be able to achieve a successful resolution.

10. Help the subject to see that what happens is really up to them and that you will help if they will let you.

Demands

1. Give yourself plenty of room to negotiate.

2. Start by asking for a lot. This gives you fall-back positions from which to work when the subject refuses.
3. Make the subject work for everything that is asked for. This creates problems for the subject to solve and tends to reduce expectations.

4. Use every decision made or concession anticipated to keep the subject occupied and working.

5. In a hostage situation, always try to get something in return for every concession made. In crisis situations, this is not necessary.

6. Conserve concessions as long as possible.

7. Do not give things away too fast.

8. Some concessions may get promises only.

9. Be careful about giving things away on good faith or to establish rapport. In crisis situations, no problem.

10. Keep a log of all concessions.

11. Never ask for demands. Listen for them.

12. Remember that substantive demands are part of a hostage situation. Non-substantive demands may not indicate that you are dealing with a hostage situation.

13. Do not bring up old demands. The subject may lose interest in some demands made as time and negotiations advance.


15. Concessions need not always be tangible.

**Face-to-Face Negotiations**

Face-to-Face negotiations has a very specific meaning for the hostage and crisis negotiations.

While the prospect of actually being caught out in the open with an armed hostage taker and
hostage is a possibility, the meaning here is quite different. In the open, you rely on all of your skills and do the best that you can. The consideration of whether or not to go face-to-face with a hostage taker requires special consideration of several factors listed here.

1. Postpone going face-to-face until sufficient time has passed to allow for rapport to be built on the phone and for exaggerated emotions to subside. While there is no specific time requirement, one to two hours after the advent of negotiations is a good starting point.

2. Have adequate cover. Concealment is not enough.

3. Plan a retreat route.

4. Go face-to-face only with adequate and / or appropriate tactical support.

5. Wear your body armor.

6. Take your weapon and ammunition.

7. Have a physical description of the subject.

8. Give the subject your description. Avoid the possibility of any surprises.

9. Consider whether or not the subject is using this opportunity as a ploy or has a hidden agenda.

10. Review body space concerns and precautions for various types of hostage takers and crisis victims.

11. Maintain eye contact with the subject. His eyes may forecast his intentions.

12. Face-to-face contacts should be done one on one only. Do not go face-to-face with multiple subjects.

13. Do not attempt this type of negotiations with weapons pointed at you.
14. Never turn your back on the subject.

15. Solicit a definite promise from the subject that, if you go face-to-face with him or her, they will not harm you in any way. If the promise is a definite one, it may increase the probability that the subject will attempt no harm during the negotiations. Probability only. No guarantees.

16. If your gut says no, don’t go. If everything seems okay, but your internal sensing mechanisms seems uncertain or hesitant, avoid the face-to-face encounter until you can determine the cause of the uncertainty or hesitancy.

**Progress Indicators**

Guessing is not an option. Neither is failure. One will get you the other. If you guess, you fail. Knowing if you are actually making progress in a negotiation is vital. It is vital for the negotiator, and it provides the basis for justifying your work to those who may question it. If you know whether or not you are being successful, you will also know if your chosen direction must continue or if other tools are necessary for success.

**Progress is probably being made if**

1. There has been no recent loss of life. In this case, loss of life prior to the commencement of negotiations is generally not considered. Loss of life subsequent to negotiations is an important indicator.

2. The hostage taker is talking more than before.

3. The content of the hostage taker’s conversations are now less violent in nature.

5. The subject is willing to discuss personal matters.

6. At those times that the negotiator takes a “time out,” and gets off of the phone, the hostage taker does not want the negotiator to leave.

7. The subject seems to become more rational than before.

8. There is a reduction in violent behavior.

**Standard Words and Phrases**

When you may not know what to say next, this is the place to look. Below are listed several words and phrases that have little or no emotional load associated with them. They are non-judgmental, encourage talking and deal with feelings. Used properly when you do not know where to go next, they will give you time to think and will demonstrate your ongoing interest in the subject and the subject’s problems. Use them individually and judiciously for best results. At times, all of us are at a loss for words. These “pat” words and phrases have been tested repeatedly, and will help you get going again.

- “First, I’d like to get to know you better.”
- “Could you tell me about it?”
- “I would like to hear your side.”
- “Could you share that with me?”
- “I guess that’s pretty important to you.”
- “Tell me about it.”
- “That’s interesting.”
- “I see.”
“Is that so.”

“Uh huh.”

Note: You may find that a well-placed grunt will do wonders for your communications skills.

The “Do’s” and “Don’ts” for Hostage and Crisis Negotiators

The Do’s

✓ Have a good opening statement
✓ Be empathetic
✓ Be credible
✓ Have good voice control
✓ Develop tolerance for stress
✓ Gather intelligence
✓ Put together a psychological profile
✓ Listen actively
✓ Pause periodically
✓ Encourage ventilation on the part of the subject
✓ Utilize self-disclosure very carefully
✓ Be flexible
✓ Nurture the escape potential
✓ Use open-ended questions
✓ Be reassuring
✓ Make the subject feel responsible for the hostages or victims
✓ List demands accurately
✓ Pass-off personal responsibility when talking to the subject
✓ Talk in terms of “We,” with the “We” meaning the subject and negotiator
✓ Talk on the subject’s intellectual level
✓ Use reflection techniques as a way of letting the subject know that you are listening
✓ Acknowledge the subject’s feelings
✓ Use reassuring remarks and clichés
✓ Give positive approval
✓ Keep the subject in a decision-making mode

_The Don’ts_

✗ Interrupt the subject
✗ Ask superfluous questions
✗ Be argumentative
✗ Insert anything for “what it’s worth”
✗ Make decisions
✗ Make promises
✗ Use “trigger” words
✗ Say “We” meaning negotiator and police
✗ Get subject irritated
✗ Volunteer information
✗ Talk too much
✗ Get mad or irritated
- Make assumptions
- Be authoritarian
- Be tough unless it is needed and appropriate
- Be soft unless appropriate
- Be defensive

**Time**

Time is generally thought of as an ally of the hostage negotiator. The longer things go, the better. The longer things go without injury or loss of life, the greater the probability that no life will be lost. The more time used in such a situation, the greater the probability that a successful resolution will be realized. This may well be true for negotiations when you have a true hostage situation. For those situations that are not defined hostage situations, time may not be helpful. Situations involving suicidal, barricaded or domestic crises usually require a somewhat quicker response. These are not hostage situations and require crisis intervention for successful management. The key to knowing about the advantages of time in a particular situation is based on your knowledge and evaluation of whether or not the incident before you is a hostage situation or a crisis.

1. Time is the ally of the negotiator in a hostage situation.
2. Time may not be an ally in a crisis situation.
3. Time allows the negotiator to work on strategy.
4. Time allows for the increase in basic human needs, the satisfying of which can be used as a negotiating tactic.

5. Time allows for rapport to be established between the subject and the negotiator.

6. Time allows the development of a dependent relationship of the subject to the negotiator.

7. Time allows for anxiety to be reduced.

8. Time allows for rational thought to increase.

9. Time allows for human bonding to occur between the hostage taker and the hostages. This is referred to as the Stockholm Syndrome.

10. Time increases opportunities for the hostages to escape.

11. Time allows for better decision making on both sides.

12. Time allows for hostage taker expectations to be reduced.

13. Time brings on exhaustion. This is good for the subject to experience; bad for the negotiator.

14. Time may create a loss of objectivity on both sides. This not a good thing for the negotiator.

15. Time increase the onset of boredom.

16. Time may create a “creeping up” effect during which established perimeters begin to collapse and control of the situation may be reduced.

Some things to consider in medical intelligence gathering

1. What medical conditions does the subject or hostage have?

2. Could this provide a potential tactical advantage to my team?

3. What kinds of medications do they take?

4. Does this affect their ability to reason with negotiators?
5. Will they get dehydrated quickly?

6. Conversely, does this person have lung disease or another condition that may make gas, or other potentially lethal agents contraindicated if used on an emergency assault?

7. If the subject is acting irrationally, is it because they are hypoglycemic?

This specialized medical intelligence gathering can be invaluable to a tactical team as well as to a negotiation team.

**The Physician in a Hostage Situation**

**Physicians Do Not Negotiate…**

- Unless police-trained to do so.
- Hostage and Crisis Negotiations Training
- Professionals can create additional problems – MD, Clergy, Lawyers, etc.
- Professionals tend to do what they do.
- Ability in other areas may not help here
- May be a much larger role for the physician in these situations.

**Take Home Points**

1. Negotiation guidelines have been carefully designed for these types of crisis situations.

2. Follow the guidelines.

3. And, do not forget to follow the guidelines.
Summary

The more one knows, the better prepared they can be. This is true in these types of situations. While if might be overly optimistic to suggest that all medical and allied health professionals should have basic course in hostage and crisis negotiations, maybe what is contained here at least can provide what is necessary so that they might help rather than hinder a critical situation. With myths dispelled and practices clarified, the chances for success are greater when crisis strikes a medical facility. Those who want to work directly with tactical and negotiations teams need to know what to expect a priori. It is hoped that readers of this information will see the value in studying and absorbing this material in much the same way as they would study and absorb medically-related knowledge. After all and unfortunately, this could well be medically-related when we least expect it to be.

Bibliography


Additional Suggested Readings


Dr. Greenstone is a Psychotherapist, Mediator, Arbitrator, Negotiator, Author, Professor, Police Officer and Police Behavioral Health Specialist. He is well known as a Police Hostage Negotiator and Trainer. Formerly, he served as the Director of Psychological Services for the Fort Worth, Texas Police Department and as the Operational Police Behavioral Health Specialist for the Hostage and Crisis Negotiation Team. Dr. Greenstone is the author of The Elements of Police Hostage and Crisis Negotiations: Critical Incidents and How to Respond to Them, The Haworth Press, Inc., 2005 (www.HaworthPress.com), The Elements of Disaster Psychology: Managing Psychosocial Trauma was published in 2007 by Charles C. Thomas, Publishers (http://www.ccthomas.com/). The Elements of Crisis Intervention, 3rd Edition was published in 2010. He is the Editor-in-Chief Emeritus of the Journal of Police Crisis Negotiations and served on the governing Council of the Committee on Publication Ethics. Additionally, he is a Diplomate of the Society for Police and Criminal Psychology. Dr. Greenstone may be reached at drjlg1@charter.net

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