

# SECURITY MANAGEMENT

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## Violence and Crime

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**W**hether de-escalating potentially violent scenarios, managing crowd control, or simply acting as a visual deterrent, highly trained K9 security teams are playing an important role at U.S. hospitals and medical centers. K9 teams are prevalent in some sectors but their role in healthcare is relatively new and exciting.

security plan was, in part, due to a perception of aggressive dogs that attack and bite people not a particularly good match for the warm and nurturing

environment healthcare organizations foster. However, the reality is that K9 teams are highly trained and responsive and may serve as a calming presence, as well as a strong visible and psychological deterrent against negative behavior.

In a healthcare facility, aggressive behavior is commonplace. The aggressive

security officer and partner K9 Raven were hired. The team was introduced to hospital staff during two weeks of orientation to allow staff to get to know and become comfortable with the team. Staff were trained on the

apprehensions from the staff.

The knowledge that a professionally trained, nationally certified K9 team and security professionals are onsite may make employees and visitors feel more secure. While the K9 is highly trained and vigilant, he also provides a comforting and friendly presence for visitors and staff. The team acts as a

staff.

The K9 team is front and center in conflict resolution. For example, recently an aunt and her niece became combative with each other and the K9 team defused the situation by simply walking into the room. In another example, the hospital went into partial lockdown with the arrival of two shooting victims related to gang violence. Family members were aggressively threatening retaliation, but the K9 team was a deterring factor in keeping hospital disruption to a minimum. Upon arrival of the team, the crowd immediately dispersed, and the threats ceased.

Recently, the K9 team observed an individual walk into the parking garage and peer into parked cars. After the team made its presence known, the



But it does come at a cost. A K9 team is much more expensive than hiring a security officer or using off-duty law enforcement. Those costs include higher wages for the officer/handler, the initial cost of the K9, and ongoing costs for care, maintenance, housing, training, and certifications. For those hospitals that decide to hire a K9 team, the initial investment is quite expensive and hard to absorb if you hire the wrong handler or something happens to the K9. Many are looking to partner with a company that can provide these services at a flat rate, which also takes on the risks and tasks most hospitals are not prepared for or knowledgeable of.

Another consideration includes the arming level of the officer/handler. Many organizations decide to arm the officer with a firearm for the protection of the team, which adds additional training and certification responsibilities requirements.

Then consider the healthcare environment and the impact the team may have in specific areas. Even with the best care, dogs have dandruff which may cause an allergic reaction. K9 teams do not usually patrol patient care areas, especially critical care and behavioral health units. They stay primarily in public areas and the exterior unless dispatched to an incident. Having the infection prevention team involved in K9 team plans is a must.

**K9 Schedule**

Once an organization decides to move forward with a K9 team, the next step is determining the size of the program. Do you need a team 24/7 or just 40 hours per week on an adjustable schedule? An analysis of the number of violent and criminal events and the timing of these events can help decide the level of K9 support needed. A good rule of thumb is to start with one team and decide whether to expand the program after seeing the results.

**K9 Comfort**

The K9 and officer are responsible for protecting each other, as well as hospital staff, which is why K9 officers are typically armed. In addition, the K9 team should have a special vehicle to transport the K9, have a location for breaks, and serve as an additional deterrent by advertising the presence of the team.

Along with the considerations listed earlier, there are other items for a health system or hospital to consider. Where will the dog go to the bathroom? Is there a rest area for the dog in the hospital? Are there areas within the facility the team should not enter? These types of details need to be ironed out before bringing the K9 into the facility.

