

PSPS Impact on Hospitals

CHA Assessment & Recommendations for PG&E Public Safety Power Shutoffs

In the substantive and detailed feedback CHA has received from member hospitals throughout the state on recent public safety power shutoff (PSPS) events, key themes have emerged for recommendation related to pre-planning, communication, and backup generators. Hospitals are centers of care, where patients and community members gather in times of distress. Prioritizing full power to these institutions is critical to their communities' well-being during these events.

Assessment

The PSPS events have had significant impact on the health of affected communities. Below are some key issues experienced by hospitals and their patients:

PSPS-Related Health Issues

Unfortunately, the loss of power for significant periods of time can cause health problems, especially for vulnerable individuals. Hospitals have reported incidents such as elderly patients falling as a result of inadequate lighting, issues with medical equipment, and an increase in medically fragile patients from skilled-nursing facilities that had failures in their backup power systems.

Durable Medical Equipment

One hospital reported patients presenting with varying degrees of respiratory distress because their home ventilation systems that require power (such as those used for sleep apnea) had been compromised. Another report included a patient who sustained severe respiratory failure, requiring intubation, and another who developed a heart attack related to decompensation.

In some instances, hospitals have received excellent support from equipment vendors to assist in caring for patients who use electricity and battery-dependent assistive technology and medical devices. However, many hospitals also report that equipment providers need to work with their patients to ensure they have a good backup plan for when power is shut off for a prolonged period of time. Hospitals also report oxygen depletion as a major issue for their oxygen-dependent patients. An additional concern of note: if home health patients don't have power at home, hospitals cannot discharge them.

Unfortunately, because community resource centers are open for only limited hours, many community members have sought power at hospitals to charge their small medical devices. During PSPS events, hospitals made their lobbies available for this charging. However, hospitals note that more charging stations are needed for non-medical devices.

Cancelled Services

As a result of the prolonged power outages, hospitals have had to reschedule elective surgeries and close clinics. In addition, many of the clinics that were able to remain open experienced patients cancelling visits because of issues related to the power outage.

Hospitals report that decisions to schedule or reschedule surgeries during a PSPS event are difficult — and made more difficult by the uncertainty of the notifications. More timely notifications that include more detailed information about power outages will enable hospitals to better accommodate patients during these events.

Recommendations for Future PSPS Events

Pre-Planning

Pre-planning and coordination with PG&E helped prepare some facilities for PSPS events. Some hospitals had no surprises from the PSPS event (i.e., they knew which parts of the electrical grid were going down and how that would impact specific facilities). Unfortunately, this type of pre-planning and communication has not been uniform. Many hospitals have been frustrated, seeking more detailed information about the exact location and duration of power outages. Hospitals are well prepared for unplanned events, like disasters. Better coordination between the hospitals and local emergency management systems would allow power companies to take advantage of existing systems of care.

Hospitals recommend:

- *Improved Pre-Planning Partnership*
More advance notice and planning for PSPS exercises, holding them well in advance of anticipated PSPS events, will allow for better coordination between the energy company and hospitals. Hospitals engage their Standardized Emergency Management Systems (SEMS) in these events. A few days' notice is insufficient for a planned exercise. Future exercises should be coordinated with the Medical Health Operational Area Coordinators (MHOAC) or health care coalitions, as well.
- *Ensure Power Company Representatives Have SEMS Background*
Having company contacts who are trained in SEMS will facilitate more informed discussions between the energy provider and hospital emergency management personnel about the PSPS impact on a broader scale and more regional level, and will help to foster an enhanced understanding of impact on patients.
- *Prioritize Restoration of Power to Hospitals and Other Providers*
Prioritizing power restoration to health facilities will allow hospitals and other providers (i.e., skilled-nursing facilities, urgent care centers) to provide the often-critical health care services that people in their communities need. Of note, hospitals report that more hospitals in the East Bay lost power to their urgent care centers and outpatient medical offices than their inpatient facilities.
- *Increase Hours of PG&E Community Resource Centers and Provide Food*
Community resources centers need to be set up immediately when a PSPS event begins and for a longer duration of time. Power charging locations should allow people to charge medical devices as well as cell phones and other personal devices. In addition, these centers should provide food options, as hospitals report members of the community flocking to their cafeterias when their power is out at home, but the lights are on at the hospital.
- *Provide Hospitals with Data About Medical Baseline Patients*
Hospitals would like to receive an updated and accurate list of household addresses of customers with medically registered DME equipment. This will allow MHOAC's to communicate

with hospitals about a potential surge — for example, if power is out longer than predicted, hospitals should be informed of how many patients who are medically dependent on power might show up in the hospital emergency department.

- *Provide Information on Potential Impact to Broader Community*
Hospitals would like to have a broader understanding of the impact of PSPS events throughout their region, even if the hospital is not included in a PSPS event. A PSPS event in a neighboring community could create a patient surge in a hospital's emergency department, particularly if the outages are more local and longer in duration in the hospital's area. Understanding the entirety of the regional outage will help them prepare.
- *Enhanced Mapping of Affected Facilities*
Hospitals have experienced challenges with obtaining accurate information about offsite clinics not directly affiliated with the account holder. Many outpatient sites are leased (one hospital has over 200 properties), leaving the hospitals to rely on information from a landlord or manually enter sites one at-a-time on the PG&E website — an onerous process at best.
- *More Accurate Mapping*
Hospitals request more accurate and narrower PSPS maps to aid in preparing for PSPS events. The current maps are often blurry and inaccurate (one hospital reported buildings not in the shaded areas that went dark and buildings in the shaded areas that stayed powered).
- *Greater Transparency About Hospital Campus Power Grids*
Hospitals need a better understanding of where their power comes from, how their campus power grids are designed, and which substations could be affected between power sources and the hospitals, so they can monitor the conditions in those areas and have a better sense of how to prepare for a potential patient surge. Hospitals report that county health departments and tribal health agencies have been given access to a critical infrastructure website, and hospitals would also like access to the website so they may view similar information. This will allow improved communication between the power company and the hospital.

Communication

Hospitals recognize there has been improved notification of PSPS events, including incremental improvements over the last year, with some reporting that the ongoing communications throughout the event were helpful. In general, hospitals would like more advance, accurate, and precise notice of PSPS events.

Hospitals recommend:

- *More Advance Notice and Precise Timing of PSPS Events*
Hospitals understand that, given dynamic weather conditions, energy companies try to wait as long as possible before turning off power in case a change in the weather warrants keeping it on. Currently, PG&E provides only a window of time for when to expect a power shut off, making planning challenging.
- *Simultaneous Updates to Hospitals and Emergency Agencies*
Hospitals report not being included in regular calls between PG&E and the Office of Emergency Services, county officials, fire departments, etc., which leads to information delays and miscommunications. The sooner hospitals can hear information, the more time they have to

prepare and adjust for patients and their communities. In addition, hospitals request more specific information about when they will be reenergized — ideally, every one to two hours. Restoring power to hospitals should be a priority, and hospitals can help manage this process if allowed.

➤ *A Living Impact Analysis*

From a SEMS perspective, hospitals would like to be provided with a living impact analysis using data provided by providers. Hospitals understand the PSPS events are dynamic but believe more actionable information that can be shared in real-time would be helpful for planning in future events. The report should be made available online.

➤ *Explore Additional Resources to Support Hospitals During PSPS Events*

Hospitals request that PG&E explore additional resources for backup power/generators during PSPS events, such as permanent acquisition, stationing, or storage of generators and related material and equipment, so health care providers do not have to purchase additional back-up power/generators for PSPS events.

Hospitals tend to the health and well-being of their communities 24/7 and are prepared for all types of unplanned events. The PSPS events have presented unique challenges given the community dynamics and the duration of the events. We look forward to continuing to work with the energy companies and the governmental entities to ensure proper prioritization and resource planning, enabling hospitals to provide seamless care to patients and the community during these times of increased need.