

Newsletter

November 2022

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Volume 6, Edition 11

RESPONDER WELLNESS



Getting through the most wonderful time of the year

"It's that time of the year again, the time when we use two powerful words repeatedly. Family and holidays. These two words evoke strong emotion, good and bad. This is no different for those who answer the call every day and see tragedy on a regular basis – our nation's first responders and their families. During this time, communication is your strongest ally. Be honest and be bold. Create a routine. Know when to talk and when to listen," writes Karen Solomon, President and Co-founder of First HELP.

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GLOBAL MEDICAL RESPONSE



Connecting teams for disaster response

When you're the federal government's largest EMS contractor, you need communications technology that can connect large numbers of people across the country at a moment's notice. That's why Global Medical Response is on FirstNet. Watch to learn more. [WATCH VIDEO](#)

FirstNet plays a vital role in GMR response "whether that incident is large or small"

By Jeffrey Marani

Director, Field Technologies
Global Medical Response

As the director of Field Technologies for Global Medical Response (GMR), I'm responsible for the day-to-day operations of our IT field technology, including all field communications, LTE operations and mobile data terminals. I also function as the communications section chief for the Office of Emergency Management for GMR.

GMR's responses encompass everything from a single-vehicle accident to a [CONTINUED ON PAGE 4](#)



RESPONDER WELLNESS

Getting through the most wonderful time of the year

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By Karen Solomon

President/Co-founder of First HELP

It's that time of the year again, the time when we use two powerful words repeatedly. Family and holidays. These two words evoke strong emotion, good and bad. And we give them the power to make us laugh or cry. But they are more than words. They are feelings and memories. They've become part of who we are. And right now, as we enter the "most wonderful time of the year," we need to understand ourselves and ensure we are safe and comfortable with the power those words hold for us.

We will all be missing someone this year. We've all lost someone, at some time in our lives and we'll feel their loss. This is no different for those who answer the call every day and see tragedy on a regular basis – our nation's first responders and their families. The most important thing to remember is that grief knows no rules, no sense of time, no appropriate way to behave. Remind yourself that you are the only person who can decide how to feel and act as memories flood through your heart.

Grief compounded with the stressors and expectations of holidays can create overwhelming feelings that seem to have no place to go. As these feelings build up, we need to find a place for them, a way to release them so we aren't overcome to the point of being unable to function.

There were many years when "It's a Wonderful Life" was

a holiday staple for me. The older I get, the more loss I see, the less I can bear during the holidays. Unless I want a good, unabashed cry for all the people I have seen suffer, I can no longer watch that movie. There is something about it that brings me to the point of being unable to function. It floods me with uncontrollable grief.

Your strongest ally

During this time, communication is your strongest ally. Be honest and be bold. Create a routine that allows you and your family to discuss feelings, reward honesty and establish emotional boundaries. Know when to talk and when to listen. Discuss everything without shame or fear and find out what each of you need to feel safe with your feelings. Perhaps one of you likes to talk and another prefers journaling. Respect your differences while encouraging creative ways to express yourself. Find ways to compromise. I can't watch "It's a Wonderful Life," but I'd love to watch "White Christmas."

Understanding each other is important. What do you need most? Someone to listen? A quiet walk alone? A sad movie that will help you release your tears?

Be honest with yourself and do not be ashamed. Alternately, don't mock or belittle someone else's needs. Throughout our lives, we develop different coping methods. Different life experiences have taught us what we need most. Personally, I like to read Amish romance novels. Everyone knows it. They don't understand it and

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RESPONDER WELLNESS

Getting through the most wonderful time of the year

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it gives them a chuckle, but it's what I need. Allow yourself and others to provide a safe outlet for your feelings without judgement.

Don't pretend you are OK

Acknowledge that you are going to have a tough time. Don't pretend you are okay if you aren't. Manage your well-being: emotional, physical and spiritual. Create a plan to safely get through your feelings and share that plan with a trusted friend. Do not accept anything less than what you need to get through this time of year. Make a list of resources or people you may need if things become especially hard. Recognize your triggers and internal warning signs.

Act on your own behalf. This can be something as simple as leaving a room for a few minutes to regroup or deciding you simply can't make that elaborate dessert. People will forget about the dessert; they won't forget about you. Your wellness is far more important than anyone else's opinion of you. Be selfish. Think of yourself first.

While it shouldn't be your job to educate others when you are struggling, sometimes it's necessary and helpful. Do you find it healing to share your story and teach others? Every person you tell will be better for it and they will educate someone else. Share what feels comfortable, share it in advance so you don't have to explain when you are in the thick of it. Share it later when you don't feel emotional or ask someone to share for you.

Set your own rules. This will make things that much easier for next year and for every family that comes after you.

Giving words power

Finally, your voice has power. Don't be afraid to communicate your pain about losing your responder to suicide, line of duty or other struggles. People are uncomfortable with the word suicide, but your grief, your healing, your needs are as relevant as any other loss. You own the space you are in. You define it. Don't let anyone's fear, bias or misunderstanding get in the way of your grieving, communicating, loving, remembering or celebrating.

You are walking a path with other survivors that has no

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room for judgement or shame. You have made it this far and you will continue to learn, heal and incorporate family and holidays into your life as appropriate. Do not put yourself aside in favor of others. Don't be afraid to say the name of your loved one. Embrace your memories. Share them and remind everyone of the most wonderful time of your life when they walked alongside you. Your family, your holiday, lives in your heart. It's not a date on a calendar or an ancestry chart. Don't let traditional definitions hold you back.

If you've lost a first responder to suicide, First H.E.L.P. offers many services to help you and your family [throughout your grief process](#). If you are an agency wondering how you can present services, take a look at the [unique training offered](#).

Looking for more resources and tips to manage stress throughout the holidays? Families who have suffered a suicide loss offer their thoughts on [The Mighty](#). Find out what one family learned from their [first holiday after a loss](#), visit [Grief.com](#) for year round resources and find tips to manage stress at the [Mayo Clinic online](#).

Karen Solomon is the President and co-founder of First H.E.L.P. (Honor. Educate. Lead. Prevent.). She is also the creator of [www.1sthelp.net](#) and the author of “Hearts Beneath the Badge” and “The Price They Pay” as well as many articles about suicide in law enforcement. Karen was a member of the 2018 Officer Safety and Wellness Group Meeting, the co-Chair of the Data and Research Committee of the National Consortium on Law Enforcement Suicide Prevention and is currently on the FBI task force to implement the Law Enforcement Suicide Data Collection Act. Karen's spouse is a police officer.

GLOBAL MEDICAL RESPONSE

FirstNet plays a vital role in GMR response

My team's role is to make sure our first responders have the tools they need to do their job. That means we have to make sure the tools function when they're supposed to function. So, they can communicate when they need to at a moment's notice. That could be on the ground, in the air or on the scene of the fire. It could be in a patient's home after they've gone home from the hospital. And FirstNet® plays a vital role, no matter the size of the incident.



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large-scale event involving thousands of people.

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A nationwide operation

GMR operates across the country and employs close to 39,000 employees. Those employees are on the frontlines everyday – treating patients at motor vehicle accidents, on the fireground at wildfires and in the air transporting critical patients.

It's absolutely imperative that our teams be able to function efficiently and seamlessly. Communication is a huge part of that. For all of our missions – large or small – failure is not an option.

We need to partner with folks who understand that – who are going to help us ensure GMR is successful at delivering care at all levels across the country.

In many instances, our teams are out there using FirstNet and probably don't even realize it. They're relying on me to make sure that when they push the button, it just works.

Our communication centers are relying on data functionality and data coming from our ambulances. They rely on automatic vehicle location (AVL) and GPS technology to determine the closest, most appropriate ambulance to respond to a scene.

From a global perspective, we monitor every moving GMR piece of apparatus. We can't have that functionality unavailable. It affects everything from beginning to end. If we can't see where vehicles are, we can't send the closest, most appropriate unit to a response.

Critical connections

First responders in the field rely on communications technology to make sure they can live up to GMR's high clinical standards. They might be in the field transmitting a 12-lead EKG to the hospital. And they're now likely doing that from the patient's side.

That means that when they leave the ambulance, they need to have technology that's going to provide them mobile data wherever they are. So, when they attach that EKG to the patient, the emergency room physician

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GLOBAL MEDICAL RESPONSE

“Nothing works down here expect FirstNet...”

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or interventional cardiologist gets that EKG and can assist in making treatment determinations or point-of-entry determinations in the field. They might also be using newer clinical innovations including video laryngoscope and ultrasound technology. They're going to attach all of those diagnostic tools to their patient care report. When that is report done, they're going to transmit it to wherever it needs to go.

Going dark for the first time ever

In October 2018, GMR disaster operations was using a legacy provider. Hurricane Michael came along and presented us with challenges we hadn't faced before.

Hurricane Michael absolutely annihilated infrastructure in the Bay County area of Florida and the Florida Panhandle. It damaged both towers and backhaul. And Internet provision to towers was down. Even if the tower itself was up, the chances were that the backhaul to that tower was down. That meant the tower was completely unavailable.

For the first time in my career, we were dark. We were forced to migrate back to analog solutions. When I say analog solutions, we were dispatching on sticky notes.

I was in the national command center and received a call from the field that I don't ever want to get again. The voice on the other end of the phone was my COO. He was calling me from downrange, doing what he always does: checking on our frontline providers.

His exact words to me were, “Nothing works down here, except FirstNet.”

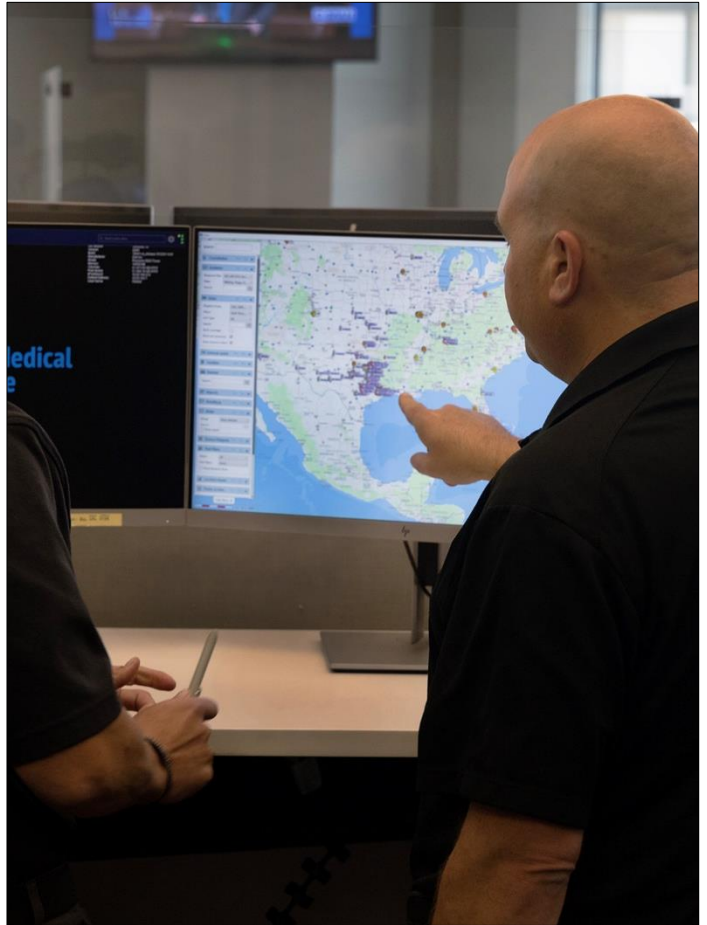
“Nothing works down here, except FirstNet”

He was calling me from a borrowed FirstNet phone, because his phone wasn't on FirstNet at the time. We've since fixed that.

I immediately engaged our FirstNet representative, with whom we had already established a relationship. His response to me was exactly what I expected it to be and exactly what I've come to expect from the folks at FirstNet.

He said, “What do you need? When do you need it? And how can we help?”

I said, “I need phones. I don't need them tomorrow, I need them now.”



“In October 2018, GMR disaster operations was using a legacy provider. Hurricane Michael came along and presented us with challenges we hadn't faced before. Hurricane Michael absolutely annihilated infrastructure in the Bay County area of Florida and the Florida Panhandle.”

His response? “Give me a couple of hours. I'm on this.”

FirstNet showed up with equipment and a team of personnel to provision that equipment. Two to three hours later, we were communicating again.

And an hour after that, we had a crew doing a long-distance trip from one part of Florida to another, to transport a trauma patient who needed immediate higher-level care.

That crew was able to get turn-by-turn directions on their phone because they had FirstNet. They were able to communicate directly with the medical director who was sitting next to me in the national command center to continuously provide orders and direction to the crew

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GLOBAL MEDICAL RESPONSE

"When my partners come together at a scene and we're using disparate radio systems, the easiest way for me to fix that is to simply hand them one of my FirstNet phones and say, 'Here you go. Use this for the remainder of the incident,'" says Jeffrey Marani.



FirstNet plays a vital role in GMR response “whether that incident is large or small”

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transporting that patient. If they weren't holding their FirstNet phone, they would've had absolutely no ability to do any of that. That basically solidified the fact that the largest provider of EMS in this country needed to be on the most reliable cellular service when the chips are down. That was FirstNet.

Keeping GMR connected

GMR uses FirstNet solutions in a myriad ways – from voice solutions to digital push-to-talk via our partner at ESChat to data solutions.

Our entire enterprise is using FirstNet in many locations, as a backup to terrestrial circuits that may fail. In many instances, that failover to a wireless circuit or a wireless service is completely transparent to the end users. They may not know a terrestrial circuit has failed and FirstNet has begun to pick up the service.

That's exactly what we want. We don't want providers worrying about what happens when something fails. It's the reason we partner with vendors like FirstNet. They believe in what we believe in: resiliency, redundancy and systems that don't fail. And if they do, it's transparent to the end user.

We also have learned – the hard way – that we need deployable LTE technology that we own, train on, test and use. GMR has five deployable systems, all with satellite backhaul, that one person can deploy near-instantly.

GMR is committed to funding technology that supports the operation. We've invested in our own customer-owned deployables, all with FirstNet, to support that mission. One of those is on top of our operations support unit, which is a large tractor trailer that we deploy to larger-scale incidents.

We own a cache of 1,200 Sonim XP8s that are sitting active and ready for us to deploy. So, we can hand one to every single ambulance that gets deployed. They're going to use it to message back and forth with dispatchers about their assignments or their current status. My dispatchers are going to use it to check on them during the hours of deployment.

Crew safety is paramount, and these devices are the lifeline back to the communications center. So, they're able to say to the dispatcher, “I have an unmet need,” or “I'm in danger.”

Communication is key

Communications is the piece of every incident that gets the most criticism.

Prior to FirstNet, there was never a guarantee everyone was going to be able to communicate efficiently and effectively. Sept. 11, unfortunately, taught us that.

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GLOBAL MEDICAL RESPONSE

Playing a vital role in GMR response – whatever the incident

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Fast-forward to today: When my partners come together at a scene and we're using disparate radio systems, the easiest way for me to fix that is to simply hand them one of my FirstNet phones and say, "Here you go. Use this for the remainder of the incident."

If everyone arriving is on FirstNet, that means interoperability is almost seamless.

A COVID-19 response

GMR's Office of Emergency Management responded to a COVID-19 deployment on a military base.

I had just arrived on the scene and the branch chief immediately called me and said, "Jeff, we're struggling with communications here, we have no data, we have very limited voice. I need some help."

I immediately reached out to the Response Operations Group at FirstNet and requested a Satellite Cell on Wheels (COW). They arrived in just under six hours and the COW was on the air about an hour later. Personnel stayed with that device through the duration of the deployment and the difference was absolutely night and day.

As I watched my vehicle-tracking map from my CAD system, the moment the COW went live, the phones in that geographical area changed from a pinkish red (which meant we had no AVL from the devices) to a bright green.

The whole area lit up green.

I turned to my colleagues and said, "This is why we call for help. This is why FirstNet comes here for us to give us support at a moment's notice."

A lifetime in public safety

I've been involved in every natural disaster deployment with GMR since Hurricane Katrina. I spent 32 days in the field for Hurricane Katrina, as a communications technician and a dispatcher.

I know what it's like to pick up a microphone and have no one answer on the other end because the device isn't working. As a paramedic, I know what it's like to try to transmit an EKG and say, "Oh, the hospital didn't receive the EKG. Something must've failed in the network."

It's an advantage for me to know exactly what goes on –



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on both sides of the fence. I don't get to treat patients as often as I would like any longer, but I have an acute understanding of everything our first responders are experiencing in the field.

Those experiences have proven to me that there's nothing more important than communications. Absolutely nothing. And to be without them is setting yourself up for failure.

Jeffrey Marani is the director of Field Technologies for Global Medical Response, responsible for the day-to-day operations of all field technology. He started his career as an emergency medical technician in the field, moving into emergency communications in 1998, where he has been since. He's also a field-functioning certified paramedic and has responded to such major events as Hurricane Katrina and many others.

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