



We designate a staff member to be our canary. On hearing an alarm, they go into the hallway close to the action and function as the vulnerable party.

Danger, Will Robinson, danger!

C. Douglas Phillips, MD, FACR

"Some issues are only huge if ignored."

Amy Guth

On any given week at my shop, three or four alarms go off.

There is the invariable missing baby or "code pink" **drill**. There is often the silver alert, for the older patient or citizen who has wandered off (I occasionally wonder if grandpa really did wander off, or if he just thought the Porsche sitting there with the keys in it looked lonely and needed to be driven at a high rate of speed down the parkway because it seemed like fun.) And then, of course, there's the obligatory fire **drill**.

I am not downplaying the significance of these events. I am, however, contemplating drills less favorably. Allow me to further elaborate.

Drills are good for many things. In the military, with its high stress and high potential level of danger, high levels of skill and performance are expected and drills are essential.

Practice, practice, practice.

But in the hospital, how many times a month do I really need to be reminded to walk down the stairs and leave the building if there is a real fire? And, lately, we don't even *leave* the building. We gather in the hallway to be told by the designated "fire person" that in a **REAL** fire, we should continue down the stairs and leave the building.

So, you know what happens: You're in the middle of a phone call with a clinician, or you're into the second paragraph of a big report on the single most complicated thing you've run into lately and, wait for it, there it is—the fire alarm—and you know it's time for the weekly drill. Dammit!

We work in closed rooms or small dark offices. It might be hard for people to know we're in there. We could skip. Just ignore it. Well, bureaucrats caught wind of that and know we try to hide. So now they send staffers in to roust us out. But, it's still a drill. We know it and they know it, because they can't get up any enthusiasm to really make us leave. So, here's my suggestion; I call it the canary in the coal mine solution.

We designate a staff member to be our canary. On hearing an alarm, they go into the hallway close to the action and function as the vulnerable party. Whether they are overcome by smoke, or heat, or they sprint out of the building—*whatever*—we have a sensor on them so the rest of us are alerted that whatever is happening is real and THEN we get moving! That way, only one person loses time, instead of the entire radiology contingent, because we've got **REAL** work to do.

Keep doing that good work, and participating in those incessant drills.

Mahalo.

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