

Overlake Medical Center values Quest's DR tabletop exercises to ensure patient safety and manage risk

Not long ago, the IT team at Overlake Medical Center in Bellevue, Washington gathered in a conference room for what they believed would be a seminar about transitioning to Windows 10. Instead, they were immediately told that they were in Disaster Recovery (DR) mode and would be live-testing their DR Runbook.

They were presented with a fictitious scenario: a regional earthquake in Eastern Washington. A data center had gone down, and the hospital's IT infrastructure was at grave risk.

If such an event were to actually happen, having precise protocols in place and being prepared to take specific steps to prevent a catastrophe could be a matter of life and death.



Scott Connelly, Overlake's Technology Manager, says ensuring that the hospital's essential IT infrastructure is never compromised is central to the organization's mission.

"Patient care and safety is Overlake's number-one priority," Connelly says, "and our IT systems play a critical role in making sure that our patients stay safe."

In the conference room that day, Shawn Davidson, Quest's Vice President of Enterprise Risk Management, joined Connelly to run a "tabletop exercise" during which a series of actions were played out. This disaster recovery exercise can be used to plan for various scenarios, including a cyberattack—in this case it was deployed to handle a natural disaster event. People in the room were assigned roles. Roadblocks were put in the way—for example, in this fictitious scenario, Connelly is unavailable, so another team member must play the role of incident commander.

The ultimate goal is to test the DR Runbook, a [step-by-step plan that Quest had helped Overlake construct](#). Following the play-by-play in the runbook, teams were assembled and given specific tasks. While this was going on, Connelly and



Davidson documented whether the teams were following the plan. The goal is to have a DR Runbook with an adequately robust plan and a team that's prepared to execute it.

"It helps us stay honest," Connelly says, "to go back and truly validate that our plan isn't missing anything. And if it is, we work with Quest to add what's needed."

Quest first developed Overlake's DR Runbook four years ago, and they've pressure-tested it with tabletop exercises each year thereafter. Connelly says over that time, Davidson's value to his organization has multiplied.

"Shawn brings a lot of industry knowledge to the table," Connelly says, "but just as importantly, he brings knowledge of Overlake to the table. Quest does a good job of really getting to know our organization and building a strong foundation. And every year we build upon what we've done to continue to improve."

Davidson says he enjoys working with the Overlake team, including CIO Scott Waters, who he has known for more than a decade, because they're dedicated to being as resilient as possible and not interrupting critical services to their patients.

"There are some clients, unfortunately, who are putting together Disaster Recovery plans because they have to," he says. "The staff at Overlake works well together, has good insights, and welcomes and values our help. That makes it easy for us to become an extension of their team and build something solid and reliable. For me, and for Quest, that's what really matters. I can't say enough about their team and how we've enjoyed working with them."

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How tabletop exercises can enhance your risk management processes



TIM BURKE | President and CEO

IN THE SAME WAY THAT PHYSICAL EXERCISE MAKES US STRONGER, DRILLS AND EXERCISES CAN STRENGTHEN YOUR ORGANIZATION'S ABILITY TO MANAGE RISK.

And just as physical fitness programs involve repetition, from weight-training “reps” to crunches, you can increase your resiliency by encouraging your team to consistently practice their risk-management processes.

“... Risk management processes, including tabletop exercises, are the only sure way to guarantee that your tools and team are prepared.”

As **cybercrime spikes and natural disasters**, including hurricanes and wildfires, become more frequent, many organizations are employing a rigorous set of practices known as “tabletop exercises.” This risk-management practice can be a crucial element of risk management planning for any type of emergency. I’d like to take a few minutes to explain what a tabletop exercise involves, how it works, and why it is an invaluable risk management solution.

The tabletop exercise, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), is “an instrument to train for, assess, practice, and improve performance in prevention, protection, response, and recovery capabilities in a risk-free environment.” Widely used as part of a risk management process, it allows your team to go through the actions of dealing with a simulated cybersecurity or disaster scenario and test-run your **Incident Response plan** or **Disaster Recovery (DR) plan**.

Tabletop exercises commonly take place in a conference room. The process frequently takes an hour or two, but some organizations will “tabletop” something big for two or three days.

The exercise generally has two goals. First, if run correctly, it simply will help your people prepare for an actual disaster scenario. It’s common for security-minded organizations to run tabletop exercises to prepare for various threats, from a cyberattack compromising a piece of vital IT infrastructure to a flood or earthquake damaging a data center.

The process should be run by a **risk management professional** who will help your team create a Runbook, which is essentially the script for your simulated rehearsal. In it, team members are assigned roles and tasks in a series of protocols which, when executed, chart a path to safety and recovery. During the tabletop exercise, they get to practice—it’s as simple as that. Studies show that introducing a little bit of stress by putting people on the spot can help them remember what they are learning.

The second, related reason to schedule regular tabletop exercises is to identify the strengths and weaknesses in your Incident Response plan. Frequently, the Tabletop exercises will reveal holes in your Runbook that you need to address. Conducting the exercise will also test the attitudes and perceptions of your team and other stakeholders so you can make improvements. Too often, organizations learn from a tabletop exercise that some team members **know way too little about risk management**.

As you are probably aware, the many threats that could cripple any business are expanding at an accelerating rate. Risk management processes, including tabletop exercises, are the only sure way to guarantee that your tools and team are prepared.

I hope you found this information helpful. As always, **contact us any time about your technology needs.**