Guide to Smartphone Personal Duress Apps for Hospitals & Health Campuses

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White Paper

At a Glance

- What are smartphone personal duress apps?
- How do they work?
- Why you should consider adding it to your security plan

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Guide to Smartphone Personal Duress Apps
for Hospitals & Health Campuses

The purpose of this short guide is to introduce hospital and health system administrators and safety personnel to "smartphone personal duress apps" and discuss how they fit into an overall security toolbox.

Today, healthcare organizations face an increasing number of safety challenges including:

- Enhancing security within hospital buildings/campuses
- Increasing safety for workers and volunteers at satellite facilities such as outpatient clinics, labs or counseling centers
- Safeguarding visiting healthcare workers on client visits
- Protecting students in teaching systems

Technology advancements, especially the proliferation of smartphones, have dramatically increased the options available for health centers to meet these safety challenges. Smartphone personal duress apps allow you to use mobile and smartphone technology to enable members of your community under duress to directly and immediately alert security personnel or first responders. Emergency alert calls and messages can go right to your security department and provide the community member's name, phone number and their GPS location, enabling you to respond faster and more effectively. Smartphone personal duress apps essentially turn your smartphones into personal "duress buttons" – without the maintenance costs and limitations of other systems.

What are Smartphone Personal duress apps?

Simply put, smartphone personal duress apps allow members of your community to tap a single button on their smartphone when they are in trouble and accomplish two things:

1. Automatically dial an emergency phone number and
2. Simultaneously send crucial information to more than a single recipient

When calling the emergency number, the button activates immediate alert texts and/or email messages that are delivered directly to your security personnel or the local emergency dispatch center as well as the administrators of your facility. Alert messages include the community member's name, phone number and, perhaps most importantly, their location using GPS technology. Responders can use this information for improved incident response.

Figure 1 – Smartphone Personal duress apps Overview

Smartphone personal duress apps can also include information on what to do in case of an emergency so community members are better prepared to take the appropriate action. This information can include natural disaster information for emergencies like earthquakes and info on how to deal with urgent situations like an armed intruder.

Smartphone personal duress apps can also improve your ability to prevent dangerous situations or keep them from escalating into true emergencies. Some examples of prevention-oriented capabilities include:

- Direct phone access to security, parking lot escorts or shuttle buses
- Allowing community members to quickly seek support from colleagues in non-emergency but urgent situations
- Ability to report potentially dangerous situations to a "See Something, Say Something" program

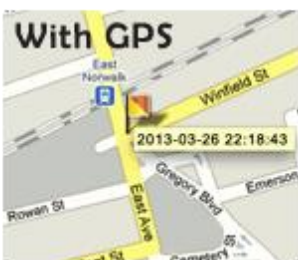## How it Works

In this section we'll look at Smartphone duress system capabilities in more depth. In the examples below we discuss DefenCall's Health Center StaySafe solution, but there are other providers who offer smartphone duress systems as well.

Application Components

Smartphone duress systems have two application components: a smartphone app that is used on the community member's phone and a cloud-based dashboard used by administrators.

The smartphone app is installed on the community member's smartphone and features a prominent "duress button" that the user can tap in case of emergency to immediately call the security department or local emergency number and send a text/email alert message campus security. The application uses the Global Positioning System functionality available in all smartphones to determine the user's location and send that location to first responders. The application is installed on the phone using a simple process where the user is sent a text message with a link to register. Registration is completed through a short form on the smartphone that captures the community member's name, phone number and email. Having this information allows security personnel or first responders to know not only who is requesting help, but

Figure 2 - The Value of GPS

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where they are and how to contact them when an alert is sent. The application can also allow access to a range of additional communication functions and information as described below.

The dashboard for security personnel is a website where incoming alerts can be viewed and system preferences can be set. When an alert is initiated by a community member, the dashboard displays a red alert screen with information identifying the person under duress. Clicking on the screen displays the location of the alert. First responders can be immediately dispatched to the scene of the alert.

Alerting Functions

Smartphone duress systems often offer escalating levels of protection:

Emergency Alert – This is the "panic button" prominently displayed on the main screen of the application. Tapping it sends an immediate emergency distress message directly to emergency responders, flashes a red screen on the monitoring dashboard, and can dial the emergency number automatically. The distress message includes the community member's name, GPS location, and phone number.

Non-Emergency Text Alert – This message is initiated by tapping the triangular "caution" symbol icon and is sent to a user-configured list of contacts by text message. The message includes the user's name, GPS location, and phone number. These contacts can be security personnel, administrators, colleagues, or other people. This is intended for use in situations where the user wants help, but does not think the authorities need to be involved because it is not a true emergency.

Figure 3 - Sample of phone with smartphone personal duress app

"Just Check In" – This "piece of mind" function is initiated by tapping on the green "check" icon and sends a message indicating the user is "OK" to a pre-configured contact by text message or email. Check-in messages include the community member's name, GPS location, and phone number. This function is especially useful for visiting healthcare workers, delivery personnel, and workers traveling from one facility to another.

Figure 4 – Smartphone Duress Apps Alerting Message Types

Communication Functions

Smartphone duress applications can be configured to easily connect community members to additional services that will increase their safety. One-button calling or text messaging can be configured to services such as:

- Direct calling to non-emergency police or security number
- Parking lot escorts
- Shuttle bus program
- "See Something, Say Something" program that community make community members extra "eyes and ears" to improve safety.

Emergency Information Access

Since these systems are built around a smartphone application they offer the ability to incorporate customized information that will be useful and, in some cases, life-saving to community members. Examples of information that can be included to improve community safety include:

- "What to do in an emergency" information for situations such as earthquake, fire, power outage, armed intruder, assault prevention, and other situations
- Shuttle bus maps and schedules
- Facility phone directory
- Other info from your safety procedures that can be useful in increasing community safety

Benefits of Smartphone Duress Systems

Smartphone duress systems offer significant benefits including:

- Increase community safety by providing enhanced direct access to security personnel or first responders
- Calls go directly to local police or security personnel, not a mobile 911 call routing center – vastly decreasing time from call to response
- Improved situational information to first responders through text/email messages showing who is requesting help and where they are
- Provide your facility's approved "what to do in an emergency" information that helps community members safely react to incidents
- Provide easy access to additional safety resources like parking lot escorts, shuttle maps, and other information
- Much most cost effective and flexible than duress pendants, blue light phones, or wired panic buttons.
- Simple, turnkey deployment and administration
- Quick deployment – only days to customize and activate

Conclusion

Now more than ever, community safety is of paramount importance. But also now more than ever, technology provides healthcare facility administrators and security personnel an expanded set of tools to engage and protect community members more effectively. Smartphone personal duress apps are one such tool that not only gives community members an enhanced means of requesting emergency help and dealing with extreme situations, but also improves access to first responders and provides those responders with better information to act on when every second count.

For more information or to share your perspectives on Smartphone duress systems, please feel free to contact us at info@defencall.com or +1 203-354-9164.

About DefenCall

Alert the Right People with the Right Info – Right Away. DefenCall increases the safety of students, employees, and other communities. At the tap of a button, the DefenCall mobile application speeds a direct alert to first responders and provides emergency preparation info. DefenCall offers solutions designed for colleges and universities, and health facilities.

DefenCall, Inc. is a technology platform and product company focused on improving the quality of urgent situation communications between community

members and emergency responders. DefenCall Healthcare is a smartphone-based personal duress system for medical facilities and health systems. DefenCall Campus, is a mobile alerting system connecting students' smartphones directly to campus security departments. DefenCall K-12 is an alerting system which allows classroom teachers immediate emergency "panic button" access to administration and local police.

DefenCall's DM3™ platform is a flexible system that delivers urgent multi-mode communication to community groups and public safety organizations. Originally developed for sensor-based emergency alerting for networked radiation detectors, the DM3 platform has been enhanced and expanded to include mobile device support (HTML5 and native apps), geo-location, multiple communication options, and inputs for crowdsourced data. Key benefits of the system are its low cost, robust functionality and fast deployment capabilities.

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