

The Importance of Workplace Violence Prevention in Health Care Settings

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Sentinel Event Alert

Physical and verbal violence against health care workers

"I've been bitten, kicked, punched, pushed, pinched, shoved, scratched, and spat upon," says Lisa Tenney, RN, of the Maryland Emergency Nurses Association. "I have been bullied and called very ugly names. I've had my life, the life of my unborn child, and of my other family members threatened, requiring security escort to my car."¹

Situations such as these describe some of the types of violence directed toward health care workers. Workplace violence is not merely the heinous, violent events that make the news; it is also the everyday occurrences, such as verbal abuse, that are often overlooked. While this *Sentinel Event Alert* focuses on physical and verbal violence, there is a whole spectrum of overlapping behaviors that undermine a culture of safety, addressed in *Sentinel Event Alert* issues 40 and 57;^{2,3} those types of behaviors will not be addressed in this alert. The focus of this alert is to help your organization recognize and acknowledge workplace violence directed against health care workers from patients and visitors, better prepare staff to handle violence, and more effectively address the aftermath.

What is workplace violence?

The CDC National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) defines workplace violence as "violent acts (including physical assaults and threats of assaults) directed toward persons at work or on duty."² The U.S. Department of Labor defines workplace violence as an action (verbal, written, or physical aggression) which is intended to control or cause, or is capable of causing, death or serious bodily injury to oneself or others, or damage to property. Workplace violence includes abusive behavior toward authority, intimidating or harassing behavior, and threats.³

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Published for Joint Commission accredited organizations and interested health care professionals, *Sentinel Event Alert* identifies specific types of sentinel and adverse events and high risk conditions, describes their common underlying causes, and recommends steps to reduce risk and prevent future occurrences.

Accredited organizations should consider information in a *Sentinel Event Alert* when designing or redesigning processes and consider implementing relevant suggestions contained in the alert or reasonable alternatives.

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Take a stand: No more violence to health care workers

Forms of violence to health care workers

- Biting
- Kicking
- Punching
- Pushing
- Pinching
- Shoving



- Scratching
- Spitting
- Name calling
- Intimidating
- Threatening
- Yelling



- Harassing
- Stalking
- Beating
- Choking
- Stabbing
- Killing

Statistics on violence against health care workers

- 25 percent of nurses reported being physically assaulted by a patient or a patient's family member, and about half reported being bullied (ANA)
- Workers in health care settings are four times more likely to be victimized than workers in private industry (SIA and IAHSF)
- Health care workers have a 20 percent higher chance of being the victim of workplace violence than other workers (National Crime Victimization Survey)
- Violence-related injuries are four times more likely to cause health care workers to take time off from work than other kinds of injuries (BLS)



75 percent of nearly **25,000** workplace assaults reported annually occurred in health care and social service settings (OSHA)



Violence against health care workers is grossly underreported

Only **30 percent** of nurses report incidents of violence



Only **26 percent** of emergency department physicians report violent incidents



Health care workers

- think that violence is "part of the job"
- are sometimes uncertain what constitutes violence
- often believe their assailants are not responsible for their actions due to conditions affecting their mental state



Factors associated with perpetrators of violence

- Altered mental status or mental illness
- Patients in police custody
- Long wait times or crowding
- Being given "bad news" about a diagnosis
- Gang activity
- Domestic disputes among patients or visitors
- Presence of firearms or other weapons



What to do when violence occurs



Report it! Notify leadership, security and, if needed, law enforcement.

See Sentinel Event Alert Issue 55, "Physical and verbal violence against health care workers" for more information.
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Requirements Related to Workplace Violence

Joint Commission requirements related to workplace violence	Joint Commission requirements related to workplace violence						
	Hospital	Critical access hospital	Ambulatory	Office-based surgery	Behavioral health	Home care	Laboratory
Environment of Care							
EC.01.01.01 EP 4	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
EC.01.01.01 EP 5	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
EC.02.01.01 EP 1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
EC.02.01.01 EP 2					✓		✓
EC.02.01.01 EP 3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
EC.02.01.01 EP 6			✓	✓			
EC.02.01.01 EP 7	✓	✓				✓	✓
EC.02.01.01 EP 8	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
EC.04.01.01 EP 1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
EC.04.01.01 EP 2			✓		✓		
EC.04.01.01 EP 3	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
EC.04.01.01 EP 6	✓	✓					✓
EC.04.01.03 EP 2	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
EC.04.01.05 EP 1	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓

Joint Commission requirements related to workplace violence	Joint Commission requirements related to workplace violence							
	Hospital	Critical access hospital	Ambulatory	Office-based surgery	Behavioral health	Home care	Laboratory	Nursing care center
Emergency Management								
EM.01.01.01 EP 2	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
EM.01.01.01 EP 3	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
EM.01.01.01 EP 4	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
EM.01.01.01 EP 5	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
EM.01.01.01 EP 7	✓	✓						✓
EM.02.01.01 EP 2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
EM.02.02.01 EP 1	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
EM.02.02.01 EP 2	✓	✓						✓
EM.02.02.01 EP 3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
EM.02.02.01 EP 4	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
EM.02.02.01 EP 6	✓	✓						
EM.02.02.01 EP 12	✓	✓	✓					
EM.02.02.05 EP 1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
EM.02.02.05 EP 2	✓	✓						
EM.02.02.05 EP 3	✓	✓						✓
EM.02.02.05 EP 6								✓
EM.02.02.05 EP 7	✓	✓						
EM.02.02.05 EP 8	✓	✓						
EM.02.02.05 EP 9	✓	✓						✓
EM.02.02.05 EP 10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
EM.02.02.07 EP 7	✓	✓	✓		✓			
EM.02.02.11 EP 1			✓	✓	✓	✓		
EM.02.02.11 EP 2	✓	✓						✓
EM.02.02.11 EP 3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
EM.03.01.03 EP 2	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
EM.03.01.03 EP 10	✓	✓	✓			✓		

Joint Commission requirements related to workplace violence	Joint Commission requirements related to workplace violence							
	Hospital	Critical access hospital	Ambulatory	Office-based surgery	Behavioral health	Home care	Laboratory	Nursing care center
Leadership								
LD.03.01.01	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
LD.04.01.01 EP 2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
LD.04.04.05	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Provision of Care, Treatment, and Services								
PC.01.02.13 EP 6	✓	✓						
PC.03.05.03 EP 1	✓	✓				✓		
Rights and Responsibilities of the Individual								
RI.01.06.03 EP 1	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓