

TRAINING MODULE: WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Workplace violence, as defined by The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, is any physical assault, threatening behavior or verbal abuse occurring in the workplace. Workplace violence ranks among the top four causes of death in the workplace. The healthcare industry has lost more workdays than any other industry as a result of nonfatal assaults against staff members. Every employee in a healthcare organization has the right to a safe and healthy work environment.

RISK FACTORS

Because of the services, type of clients, and construction of facilities, violence levels in healthcare is extreme. The major risk factors associated with workplace violence in healthcare organizations include staff shortages, agitated clients, lone assignments or isolated areas, times of increased activity, long waits, inadequate security, and lack of violence prevention programs.

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Environmental workplace violence prevention measures should be evaluated for appropriateness within the healthcare organization, including the use of employee ID badges, surveillance cameras, entrance door detectors, areas free of weapon-type objects and well trained and visible security staff. The environment should also include well lit areas, uncluttered hallways and exits with easy access. Healthcare organizations should encourage personnel in a potentially violent situation to be observant, stay calm, acknowledge the individual, answer questions appropriately and honestly, be empathetic and sincere, respond to all requests, respect personal space and avoid aggressive body posturing and tone of voice. These techniques may de-escalate the situation. Staff training should also include, as appropriate, release techniques, initiation of a partner system, planned escape routes, and the use of emergency alarms and codes.

KEEP YOURSELF SAFE

An increasing number of potentially violent patients are entering healthcare organizations. While violence may be more common in psychiatric and emergency departments, it can also be found in other areas such as waiting rooms and home health. A recent survey by the Emergency Nurses Association indicated that violent incidents are rising. More nurses are being bit, hit, spit upon and kicked, and an increasing number of violent attacks, such as assault, rape, and homicide are being reported.

- Keep yourself safe when encountering violent patients or residents by being aware of escape routes, using a non-threatening stance, allowing the individual their personal space when possible, staying calm and empathetic, and using the partner system.
- Avoid challenging the individual through body posturing or tone of voice. You should also avoid making promises you cannot keep. It is not only the responsibility of the organization to keep staff safe from assault; you must also be aware, observant, and educated. Be prepared to deal with a violent situation.

LATERAL VIOLENCE

Lateral violence is defined as incidents between coworkers in which psychological injury is inflicted. These bullying acts have caused many nurses to abandon their profession. Lateral violence includes harassment, verbal abuse, demeaning language or behavior, gossiping, and sabotaging. This violence can result in tension in the work area, loss of work time, low morale and poor quality of care. You must report any incident of lateral violence to your supervisor, whether you are a recipient or observer.