

5 Steps to an Effective Healthcare Workplace Violence Plan

Workplace violence is a recognized and increasing hazard in the healthcare industry. Emergency departments, where there is open public access and patients of all kinds are brought in around the clock, can be chockfull of turmoil, uncertainty and risk. This intense atmosphere can include situations where perpetrators follow the victim to the hospital to continue what was started elsewhere. Add the stress of individual health concerns, or those of a loved one, and you have an unpredictable environment.

As healthcare leaders approach this critical issue, it is important to establish clear goals and objectives to prevent healthcare workplace violence. The following steps will help you build an effective plan:

1. Plan:

Outline a comprehensive plan for maintaining security in the healthcare workplace. One of the most proactive measures a healthcare facility can take is to coordinate with community partners to ensure a robust and effective workplace violence prevention plan. Partners on the committee should include, but are not limited to –police, fire, EMS and other hospitals.

2. Document:

Develop a clear definition of workplace violence behaviors, with equally clear consequences for verbal and nonverbal threats and related actions. Communicate this policy to all personnel in written form regularly to show that leadership takes this topic seriously and has put in place policies and security measures. In the case that an emergency does strike, it is important to have protocols posted in designated high-traffic areas. For example, if your emergency room is shut down during an active shooter incident, there must be a plan for where to divert patients.

3. Support:

Your security team must be an integral and involved part of your emergency response planning process. Affirm leadership's commitment to an environment that places as much importance on staff safety and health as on serving the needs of the patient. Security can assist with risk assessments, training, staffing, developing policies and procedures and coordinating drills.

4. Report:

An established reporting process will encourage hospital staff to promptly report incidents and suggest ways to reduce or eliminate risks. Once you've established the emergency response planning committee with the right people, monthly meetings are recommended, but at the very least, meetings should be held quarterly. Additionally, the plan should remain a living document and committee members should share updates on construction projects, patient volume, violent incidents, etc.

5. Communicate:

Ongoing communication is critical to maintaining a culture of awareness and prevention. This should not end with the staff, as patients should also be aware of the hospital's commitment to preventing violence. Build relationships with administrators and security directors from other hospitals in your community. Ask about their security program and provider and what they may or may not like. Sharing information and best practices is mutually beneficial and will provide honest feedback that is helpful to both parties.

It is essential to recognize that no two facilities are the same. Therefore, the workplace violence prevention program for your hospital needs to be unique to your environment. Ensure that your hospital is prepared should the unthinkable occur and have the right emergency response measures in place to meet regulatory standards.