

## The Publics health: what about ours....

**Nurses today:** work in a world where violence is all too common. It includes a range of behaviour from verbal abuse, threats, and unwanted sexual advances to physical assault and in some cases death.

For the public health service and homecare workers, this is an increasing problem. Because the outside world is their workplace and hospitals are a hectic environment, risks can range from visitors and intruders, to patients and even fellow employees.

Work place violence takes a high toll on productivity and well being. Aside from physical injuries, verbal and physical assault leave an aftermath of distress and anxiety, which can take months to resolve.

A recent survey shows nurses rank assault as one of their great concerns. In the past year more than half of the nurses surveyed were threatened or verbally abused. Experiences of assault and abuse in the workplace are known contributors to nurses wanting to leave the profession.

### Harness asks you to consider these questions:

- How does violence from the surrounding community affect your workplace?
- Do services such as psychiatric care and traumas increase the risk?
- Does your hospital layout invite violence? e.g. overcrowded rooms etc.
- Where and how frequently do assaultive incidents occur?
- Are incidents being reported?
- Are current strategies effective and responsive?
- Is a support scheme in place for staff?
- Are staff experienced in dealing with these matters?

### Take a closer look:

Work with employees to make the necessary changes, monitor incidents and determine if controls are effective. Be supportive of colleagues who encounter workplace violence. The following ideas may reduce contributory factors:

- Train staff to be alert for potential violence and suspicious behaviour.
- Implement working polices for threats of violence or assault.
- Develop a reporting system to highlight potential risk areas.
- Improve staffing levels, particularly at high activity times.
- Improve lighting and video surveillance. Install panic buttons.
- Encourage an awareness scheme, allowing staff to alert colleagues of known patients with a history of assaultive behaviour.
- Assess and regularly consult staff about emergency response systems.
- Address Scheme

Participate wherever possible in regular workplace assessments. Be seen to be taking the problem seriously. Work together with staff to form a safety committee and encourage staff to report incidents. Show staff, you and management are committed to improving department security.

### Further steps:

**SAFE.**

- Hold **all** persons accountable for their behaviour within your facility; patients, visitors and employees, and pursue civil and criminal processes when necessary.
- Monitor the flow of visitors and minimize waiting periods. Change inflexible systems or routines.
- Encourage staff to wear ID badges, reduce the confusion of who is who!
- Be confident in using restraint, but use it judiciously.
- Train key staff to detect potential agitation and develop techniques to calm the situation down.

Both physical and psychological factors may contribute to aggressive behaviour, a history of violence, dementia, drugs and alcohol and the environment itself can all contribute. Show staff how to activate an emergency response system to protect themselves and reduce the risks.



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