

Workplace Violence: The Warning Signs

Be alert to patients or visitors who:

- Have a history of violence
- Overreact to uncertainty
- Threaten staff
- Accuse staff of being out to get them
- Demonstrate excessive anger
- Blame others for their problems
- Use abusive language
- Throw or punch things
- Are under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Show or claim to have a weapon

Be alert to co-workers or former employees who:

- Threaten bosses or other workers
- Blame others for job problems
- Vow to get even
- Believe that others are out to get them
- Carry grudges
- Seem overwhelmed by financial or personal problems
- Become angry easily or often
- Are defensive when criticized
- Are easily frustrated
- Show intense interest in discussing or owning weapons
- Are suspicious of the motives of others
- Abuse alcohol or drugs
- Have become increasingly troubled or developed negative attitudes or behaviors
- Become obsessed with an individual or situation

Recognizing Danger in the Workplace

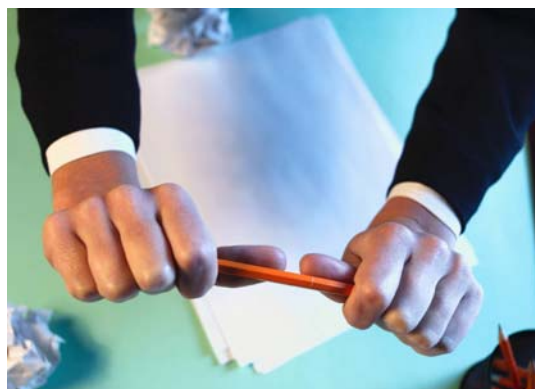
"If you work in healthcare the question isn't if you're going to encounter workplace violence, it's when."

That's the attitude that many hospital employees have about workplace violence. They believe that it's just part of the job.

While it is true that violence or threats of violence occur slightly more frequently in hospitals, clinics, and nursing homes than in some other workplaces, the attitude that it's just part of the job may be part of the problem. If workers expect to be abused by patients, visitors, or co-workers, they may inadvertently create an environment in which abuse is condoned or even fostered.

The truth is that if you work in a healthcare facility, you are going to encounter people in highly emotional states. Some patients or visitors may become violent due to drug or alcohol abuse, mental illness, or stress from dealing with illness, injury, or death. And the danger isn't always from the public. Healthcare workers may suffer from the same maladies that plague their patients—alcohol or drug use, emotional problems, and stress—and they, too, can become violent.

When people reach the end of their ropes, some small event or a feeling of hopelessness or helplessness can trigger a violent act. It's important to remember, however, that violence is usually a desperate last resort, often preceded by warning signs.



At UK Hospital, our job is to:

- Create an environment in which violence or the threat of violence is not condoned.
- Learn to recognize the warning signs that often precede violent behavior
- Utilize the systems in place to report the warning signs, when possible,
- Learn ways to de-escalate potentially violent situations and protect ourselves and others.
- Prevent situations that could "invite" violence.

Prevent Situations that "Invite" Violence

There are some things that employees can do to decrease the risk of violence in the hospital.

- Report poorly lit areas—corridors, parking garages, stairwells.
- Don't walk alone to your car.
- Report unauthorized persons in restricted areas.
- Limit visitors to permitted areas and locations.
- Secure belongings.
- Never lend anyone your ID badge.
- Let Security know if you will be working alone in an isolated area.



Fire Forces Evacuation of MA Hospital

One hundred patients evacuated the upper levels of the six-story Milford (MA) Regional Medical Center this week after a fire broke out in a biomedical waste storage room, *The Boston Globe* reported.

When smoke filled the hallways, staff members brought patients to the ground floor of the facility. A sprinkler system put out the flames, but burning plastic bags containing the bio-waste quickly generated thick smoke throughout the building. It is unclear at this point what kind of biological waste caught on fire. The fire is under investigation.

Firefighters checked air in the building for carbon monoxide and other hazardous waste residue.

"We want to make sure the atmosphere is completely safe to put those patients back in their rooms," Fire Chief John Touhey told *The Globe*.

It took several hours for the smoke to clear and for patients to return to their rooms, according to Frank Saba, hospital president.

An Environment in Which Violence is Not Condoned

The Hospital has a policy that states that it does not tolerate violence in the workplace. The policy defines violence as:

- Intimidation
- Threats
- Physical attack
- Property damage
- Use or possession of a weapon

And, if that isn't clear enough, the policy actually defines intimidation, threat, and physical attack so there can be no mistake as to their meanings.

Unfortunately, saying that an employer doesn't tolerate violence isn't the same as creating an environment in which acts of violence are acknowledged, reported, and dealt with quickly and appropriately. That's where we come in.

Recognizing the Signs for What They Are: A Warning

As employees, we've got to be tuned in to the signs that a situation or individual is spiraling out of control. That doesn't mean that each of us doesn't exhibit some of this "bad" behavior from time to time, but we've got to notice when bad behavior becomes consistent or elevated.

To help employees recognize the warning signs, we've listed some of them in the sidebar on page 1 of this newsletter. Managers and supervisors must teach employees about workplace violence to help them prepare for work in this environment. In addition, employees must be taught how to report warning signs and violent incidents.

Reporting Incidents and Warning Signs

Hospital Policy 01-18 outlines the procedure for reporting what the employee perceives to be imminent danger of violence and for reporting an incident.

- If someone appears to be *about to become violent*, notify
 - Supervisor
 - Security, 3-6156
- If the person becomes violent, call 3-5200 and ask for "Assistance Please".
- If the person has a weapon or claims to have a weapon, call 911.

Managers must also encourage employees to report warning signs, so that actions can be taken to decrease the likelihood of an incident.

A Trained Response Team is Available

UK Hospital has "Assistance Please" response teams, trained to de-escalate and intervene in violent situations. Security and personnel assigned to areas where there is a history of violent incidents have been taught to work together using specific response techniques.

It's important for employees to remember that this resource is available by simply calling 3-5200. The hospital provides this service to minimize the risk of harm to untrained staff members.

