

Workplace Violence Prevention in Hospitals

Completed Occupational Health Branch Activity, 2002-2005

Background and Purpose

Each year about 1 million workers in the U.S. are assaulted on the job. Health care workers, particularly those working in the Emergency and Psychiatric Departments, have a high risk for work-related assaults. To address these high rates of violence, the state of California implemented Cal/OSHA guidelines and the California Hospital Security Act (AB508) to reduce workplace violence in health care facilities. Most other states do not have these types of initiatives.

A research team from the University of Iowa, University of North Carolina, and University of California, San Francisco conducted a NIOSH-funded study from 2002 through 2005. The CDPH Occupational Health Branch and New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services assisted the research team in selecting hospitals in California and New Jersey. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effects of the Cal/OSHA Workplace Violence guidelines and the California Hospital Security Act on hospital security programs and to see if they were successful in reducing assaults on health care workers.

Activities

The research team:

- Interviewed Nurse Managers of the Emergency and Psychiatric units in hospitals participating in the study;
- Collected assault data (reviewed the incidents and circumstances related to assaults) from OSHA logs and other databases; and
- Analyzed the interviews and assault data to identify practical solutions and possible barriers to implementing effective hospital workplace violence prevention.

Findings

The study found that while almost every hospital had taken many steps to reduce workplace violence among healthcare workers, there were several additional recommendations that hospitals should consider in improving their workplace violence prevention programs. The complete report to NIOSH of the research findings among the California hospitals can be found in the **Occupational Health Surveillance and Evaluation Program** Publication listing on our website, www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/ohb.

Partners

- New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, Occupational Health Service
- University of California, Los Angeles, School of Public Health
- University of California, San Francisco, School of Nursing
- University of Iowa, College of Public Health
- University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, College of Public Health
- Public Health Institute

What are the risk factors for violent behavior in hospitals?

Risk factors involving patients and the public include:

- Patients, family, or visitors carrying weapons;
- Persons with a history of violent behavior;
- Hospitalizing criminals;
- Early release of acute and chronically mentally ill patients;
- Right of patients to refuse psychiatric medication or hospitalization.

Factors concerned with staffing and the hospital environment include:

- Hospitals located in high crime areas;
- Staffing patterns, including a shortage of trained staff;
- Staff working alone without systems for calling emergency assistance;
- Long waits in emergency rooms.

Related Resources (current at the time project was completed)

- Violence: Occupational Hazards in Hospitals - National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety (NIOSH), 2002 [www.cdc.gov/niosh/2002-101.html ; www.cdc.gov/niosh/pdfs/2002-101.pdf]
- Occupational Violence – NIOSH topic [www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/violence/]
- California Hospital Security Act (Assembly Bill 508), 1993 [www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/93-94/bill/asm/ab_0501-0550/ab_508_bill_931008_chaptered]
- Guidelines for Security and Safety of Health Care and Community Service Workers - Division of Occupational Safety and Health, Department of Industrial Relations, 1993 [www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/dosh_publications/hcworker.html]
- Violence on the Job: A Guidebook for Labor and Management, Labor Occupational Health Program, U.C. Berkeley, 1997 [www.lohp.org/Publications/Violence_On_The_Job/violence_on_the_job.html]

Related OHB Publications

- **Evaluation of Safety and Security Programs to Reduce Violence in Health Care Settings** - Final Project Report, January 2007

This publication and more information about the work of Occupational Health Branch (OHB) are available on our website: www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/ohb