

Addressing Workplace Violence in NH Hospitals

Healthcare workplace violence is a constant threat to the well being of both staff and patients. Documentation as well as viable solutions are inconsistently defined at the local and national levels. Despite these limitations, health care staff and researchers are coming together to better understand these challenges and identify solutions that are realistic and have impact.

The Challenge

Healthcare workplace violence has major consequences, contributing to staff burnout, PTSD, leaving the job, anxiety, and depression as well as adversely affecting the quality and safety of patient care. In 2020, a group of concerned healthcare workers and public health advocates in NH launched a pilot study to assess the prevalence of violence experienced by fellow healthcare staff across a variety of healthcare facilities. One of the recommendations from this work was to conduct additional research focusing on violence occurring within hospital emergency departments as these sites reported the highest rates of violence experienced by healthcare staff.

"It's not always so much one event that causes harm - some weeks the verbal and physical aggression just... stacks up...Berated by unhappy patients in triage about how bad of a job we're doing, being threatened with lawsuits, being threatened by mental health patients. All these things add up. It makes me feel like the job I do is never good enough. Makes me not want to be a nurse."
– 2022 NHHVP Survey Respondent

The Response

To this end, the NH Healthcare Violence Prevention Group (NHHVP) was formed in collaboration with the NH Occupational Health Surveillance Program. Its goal was to conduct an online survey-based study of staff experiences of violence in emergency departments and to form a coalition of hospitals interested in reducing these events. Six NH hospitals agreed to participate in 2022, providing support for question development, staff recruitment, discussion of solutions and next steps. Over 200 staff responded to the survey, representing hospitals serving both rural and urban populations.

Three quarters of respondents experienced some form of violence (verbal aggression, physical aggression, sexual aggression, harassment, or intimidation) over a six month period. Over two-thirds of this group experienced one or more of these forms of violence multiple times per week. Over one in three of those impacted by violence considered leaving their job or their profession as a result of the incident. Only half of those impacted reported the incident, with two-thirds indicating that the lack of reporting was because they didn't think anything would change.

While the challenges identified are sobering, staff also shared a range of solutions, including: physical updates to facilities, better training and equipment, additional personnel, as well as improving hospital and state policies around the preparation, reporting, and follow-up of violent events.

The Impact

As a result of this effort, not only have multiple action steps for improvement been identified, but a new dialogue and opportunity for future action has been created. All six participating hospitals have agreed to continue working together with the NHHVP to learn the most effective steps to improve staff and patient safety. In so doing, they not only add to the body of research on what works, but also are able to fine tune the application of best practice given the unique dynamics of each organization. This can produce systematic improvement in an area that can have far-reaching implications for each organization's ability to achieve its healthcare mission.

"While this report isn't breaking news to bedside staff, it is incredibly eye opening to hospital leadership and non-bedside providers. My hope is that the data in this report can bring to light how violent healthcare has become, and that the hospital relationships that grow out of this group will allow the sharing of best practices to help keep all NH healthcare workers safe."

-Stacey Carroll, MSN, RN, CCRN-K, NHDP-BC
Director, EMS Coordinator
Southern New Hampshire Health

This work comes at a critical time in New Hampshire's healthcare landscape. Pam DiNapoli, Executive Director of the NH Nurses Association, shares that several key elements are coming into play this year that can have long-lasting impacts on making hospitals safer for both staff and patients. Among these are the implementation of initiatives outlined in SB459, such as the statewide Healthcare for Patient Safety Commission and hospital violence prevention programs. As a part of this process, the NHHVP will continue expansion of the initial Consortium group that has dedicated itself towards making NH's emergency departments safer for everyone.

Findings from the research, funded by the Endowment for Health and the NH Occupational Health Surveillance Program, are available here

(<https://iod.unh.edu/sites/default/files/media/2022-11/health-care-workplace-violence-state-report-10-24-22-1-posted-final-2.pdf>) or from Project Lead, Peter Antal at pantalconsulting@gmail.com.