

PRESENTER'S GUIDE

"WORKPLACE VIOLENCE IN HEALTHCARE FACILITIES"

Part of the General Safety Series

OUTLINE OF MAJOR PROGRAM POINTS

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The following outline summarizes the major points of information presented in the program. The outline can be used to review the program before conducting a classroom session, as well as in preparing to lead a class discussion about the program.

- **Thousands of violent assaults occur in healthcare facilities every week.**
 - Victims are punched and kicked.
 - They suffer physical and emotional trauma.
 - Some even die.
- **This type of violent behavior takes place all too often in facilities such as hospitals, urgent care clinics, nursing homes and even doctor's offices across the country.**
- **Healthcare workers can be attacked by patients, visitors, intruders from outside the facility, and other employees as well.**
- **In addition to its human cost, workplace violence also prevents a facility from delivering quality care safely.**
- **It's an unpleasant fact that violence can occur anywhere that people are together.**
 - Hospitals and other healthcare facilities are no exception.
 - Almost three quarters of all workplace assaults occur in healthcare settings.
 - Seventy percent of nurses say they have been physically or verbally attacked by patients.
 - An estimated 80% of people who work in "emergency medicine" will experience some form of violence in the course of their career.

- **Why is violence such a big problem, even in facilities that are dedicated to caring and healing?**
- **Some healthcare facilities, particularly emergency care centers, exist in an almost constant state of crisis.**
- **Patients, their families and friends, or other visitors can become frustrated and angry with:**
 - Waiting.
 - Questions about insurance.
 - Having to pay for treatment.
- **Some people may be intoxicated or have psychological problems.**
 - Others may have been brought in under arrest.
 - Gang members or other intruders may be there to steal drugs, or to attack rivals who are receiving treatment.
- **Healthcare employees can also get "stressed out" and may lash out physically at patients, or even each other.**
- **Workplace violence not only hurts healthcare employees physically, it can also damage their emotional health.**
 - It can decrease their productivity and lower morale, and may even drive them out of the healthcare field entirely.
 - Violent disruptions can affect a facility's standard of care and damage their reputation as well.
- **A hospital or nursing home that can't maintain a safe and secure environment will have difficulty attracting new patients and retaining high-quality staff.**
 - So the control and prevention of workplace violence must be a top priority in the healthcare field.
- **But healthcare employers and their employees have a powerful resource for "fighting" back against workplace violence.**

- **In 1996 OSHA (the Occupational Safety and Health Administration) published "Guidelines for Preventing Workplace Violence for Healthcare and Social Service Workers".**
 - They recommend that each facility should create its own written workplace violence prevention program.
 - The program is built around five core elements.

- **The first is management leadership and employee participation.**
 - Everyone in the facility needs to get behind the program and work together to help it succeed.

- **Hazard identification and assessment is critically important.**
 - The potential situations where violence could occur need to be identified, and solutions developed to address them.

- **Next comes hazard prevention and control.**
 - Once potential "trouble spots" have been identified, employers should implement appropriate measures to control or eliminate them.

- **Education and training is also key.**
 - Everyone in the facility should receive training in their program's violence prevention policies and procedures.

- **Recordkeeping and program evaluation is the final element.**
 - The program should be monitored on an ongoing basis to assess its effectiveness, identify any new problems and develop improved solutions where needed.

- **To be effective, a workplace violence prevention program requires that all levels of a healthcare organization "buy in" to the process.**

- **Management must demonstrate its commitment to the program.**
 - They should make it clear that aggressive or violent behavior will not be tolerated, and that a culture of respect will be fostered within the facility.
- **Employee participation is crucial.**
 - Workers contribute their own perspectives, and an in-depth understanding of their departments and work environment.
- **Your knowledge is key to:**
 - Identifying situations in your job, and locations in the facility, that could have the potential for violence.
 - Developing ways to address these situations.
- **Your contribution can be important both in the initial stages of the program as well as on an ongoing basis.**
 - If new tasks or changes in your workplace create new sources of potential violence, make sure that you share this information with the people who manage your violence prevention program.
- **The process of identifying the potential for violence in a workplace, and figuring out how to control or eliminate it, begins with a thorough study of the work environment itself, as well as the jobs that are performed there.**
- **Some locations in healthcare facilities have a higher potential for violence than others, but effective security can reduce the risk in all of them.**
 - Security measures can include installing video surveillance and alarm systems, or posting guards.
 - Access to the facility and various areas inside it can be restricted, and employees can be issued unique ID badges and electronic or mechanical keys to gain admittance.

- **All areas should be well-lit, and floor plans should be arranged so that both security personnel and employees who work there have a clear view of everything in the area.**
- **Waiting rooms that are crowded or uncomfortable increase the likelihood that patients and others who use them will get upset.**
 - To prevent this, these spaces should be designed to create an atmosphere that's welcoming, calm and comfortable.
- **Some types of people are more likely to become violent than others, including those who:**
 - Are intoxicated.
 - Have a history of violence or mental instability.
 - Have been brought to the facility under arrest.
- **Assessing a patient's potential for violent behavior should be made a standard part of the admissions process, so that the possibility of problems can be addressed before they become real ones.**
 - High-risk patients could be transferred to another area in the facility that is more secure, or a to a different facility altogether.
- **Employees who work behind counters have less freedom of movement than other healthcare workers, so they are more likely to be grabbed or hit by attackers.**
 - One way to prevent this is to enclose nurses' stations and similar spaces with materials such as Plexiglas.
 - Counters can also be made deep enough to keep healthcare personnel out of the reach of would-be attackers.
- **To prevent attackers from using furniture as weapons, it should be too heavy to move easily, or secured to the walls or the floor.**

- **"Panic buttons" and other forms of emergency communication should be conveniently located and easily accessible, so they can be reached quickly in case of trouble.**
- **Once your violence prevention program has identified the potentials for violence that exist in your facility, and developed solutions to control or prevent those situations, the next step is to educate everyone in the organization about them.**
 - This can be done in a classroom, over the internet, in live "walk-through" sessions or even one-on-one with a mentor.
- **The training will address basics such as:**
 - How workplace violence affects healthcare facilities.
 - The purpose and content of your employer's violence prevention program.
 - Your responsibilities under the program.
- **You will learn about:**
 - Your facility's security system and how it protects you.
 - The locations of safety devices such as panic buttons, as well as emergency exits and "safe rooms" where you can take refuge.
- **Your training will help you to recognize:**
 - The types of situations that can lead up to aggressive behavior in healthcare environments.
 - Signs you can look for that can indicate a person may be close to becoming violent.
- **These can include things such as pacing, rapid breathing and aggressive posturing.**
 - Angry people can have a "flushed" appearance, and complain or make sarcastic or insulting comments as well.
 - They may also begin to speak faster and more loudly, or in a threatening tone of voice.

- **Learning to "de-escalate" tense situations and "intervene non-violently" with angry patients and visitors can help you defuse problems before any aggression takes place.**
- **For example, you shouldn't confront an angry person.**
 - Don't add fuel to the fire by raising your voice or telling them to "calm down".
 - Don't get in a power struggle with them.
 - Don't roll your eyes, interrupt them or show that you're frustrated with them, even if you feel it.
- **Instead, speak slowly and calmly.**
 - Ask them how you can help.
 - Use the person's name if you know it.
- **Try to provide options for resolving the situation. Remember to phrase what you say in terms of "we" and "us", such as:**
 - "Let's look at some options"
 - "Here's a way we can do this".
- **But don't promise anything you can't deliver.**
 - That will just make the situation worse.
- **While you may receive training in being "physically prepared" for workplace violence, the focus will usually be on non-aggressive techniques that can help you escape from an attacker.**
 - However, in high-risk environments, actual self-defense training may also be provided.
- **In spite of everyone's best efforts to prevent it, violence can still occur in a healthcare facility.**
- **If it does, remember your training:**
 - Avoid injury by getting away from the attacker.
 - Take refuge in a "safe room" if necessary.
 - Notify security via a panic button, phone or other communications system.

- **Any victims of workplace violence should receive medical attention as soon as possible.**
 - Even if they have no obvious injuries they should be examined, and treated if necessary.

- **All violent incidents should be reported immediately to a supervisor as well as to the local police, regardless of who was involved in the event and how they are related to the victim or the facility.**
 - So if you witness violence in your workplace, write down the facts about what happened as soon as you can, while your memory is still fresh.

- **Your record should include details such as:**
 - When and where the incident occurred.
 - Who was there, and what was said and done.
 - The victim's physical and emotional condition afterward.

- **If the assault was committed by a patient, the behavior should be noted in their medical record as well.**

- **This documentation may be needed if any legal issues arise, but it has an even more important purpose.**
 - The information contained in medical records, incident reports, employee surveys, interviews and other documentation makes it possible for your facility to both assess and improve the effectiveness of your violence prevention program.

- **Problem areas can be identified and new solutions developed and implemented to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future.**
 - This process of "continuous improvement" will help to make your violence prevention program a permanent and vital part of your facility's health and safety strategy.

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- **Workplace violence hurts people, damages the institutions where it occurs, and interferes with providing quality care safely.**
- **OSHA recommends that all healthcare employers create a "workplace violence prevention program".**
- **Employee participation is crucial to the success of any violence prevention program.**
- **If violence occurs, be sure to document the event, so that your facility can find ways to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future.**
- **Now that you understand the potential for workplace violence in healthcare environments, and know practical strategies for dealing with it, you can help to make your facility a safer place for patients, your coworkers... and yourself!**