

Interlocutor

News from the Dallas-Fort Worth Hospital Council



DALLAS-FORT WORTH
HOSPITAL COUNCIL

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North Texas Hospital Economic Impact

\$14 billion

page 6

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Fighting **FIRE** with **Water**



How healthcare is extinguishing the flames of workplace violence

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH HEALTHCARE VERY LONG before the stories become all too common. An ICU nurse receives a broken wrist from a teen experiencing drug induced psychosis, the Emergency Department worker who was choked “nearly to death” for not meeting the demands of a patient who wanted to smoke, or the Safety and Security officer who received a lethal kick to the head from a semi-restrained patient.

For persons outside of healthcare, data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics – indicating that 60 percent of all workplace assaults occur in the healthcare and social services arena – are not something they are even aware of. But for those of us who have been in the field of patient care for any length of time, it’s not surprising. Violence on the job is something we’re all too familiar with.

For managers, directors and executives, training staff members to counteract violence in the workplace can be a tough decision. We know the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires a place of employment “free

from recognized hazards” that might result in death or serious physical injury and corporate liability dictates likewise. So how do we provide protection for our patients, visitors and staff and at the same time reach an appropriate balance between costs, training time and the organizational mission?

There are options available – from paying for individual classes to choosing a company that provides your institution with a holistic approach at creating a safer working environment.

No matter the choice, there are six basic areas that should be covered in order to maximize effectiveness within the organization and to promote stewardship of training budgets. Of course, not every staff member would receive each of these, but an effective program is prepared to offer variations depending on the duties of the individual worker. They are:

I. INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Proper and effective communication (both speaking and listening) is important in all settings, but especially those in which verbal and/or physical confrontation is more prevalent.

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2. **RECOGNIZING AND DIFFUSING CONFLICT AND AGGRESSION**

Unfortunately, conflict is not a rare occurrence in a healthcare setting, especially for those employed in pre-hospital services, emergency departments, intensive care and behavioral health units. One of the most effective methods in avoiding and/or minimizing conflict is to recognize the potential at its earliest stages. Then we can begin using skills and techniques to diffuse it before it escalates into something more threatening.

3. **SAFETY AWARENESS**

Whether in a patient's room or someone's home, staff members obviously play an important role in their own personal safety. Many understand this, however, they are looking for education and guidance on what that looks like and what steps they can utilize to increase success.

4. **LEGAL/POLICY CONCERNS**

An effective program should seek to educate the participants on the law and organizational policy as it relates to protecting themselves or others. Additionally, staff tasked with controlling violent behavior - such as those in safety and security departments - may not fully understand their responsibilities and/or limitations in restraining a violent individual. Of course, while the law may allow certain actions, any effective program will, at its core, strongly emphasize the necessity of de-escalation and confrontation avoidance.

5. **PROTECTING STAFF FROM PHYSICAL ASSAULT**

Throughout any quality program, non-violent confrontation



is repeatedly stressed as the optimum outcome of any interaction. However, many organizations fail to recognize that, no matter how adept an individual is at diffusing a potentially violent confrontation, physical violence and attack may still occur. Training an employee on how to escape when physically attacked can be accomplished...and you'll find it is very much appreciated.

6. **STABILIZING AND CONTROLLING VIOLENT BEHAVIOR**

When confronted with a violent patient or other individual, many organizations fail to utilize a trained and organized response in stabilizing the person. The proper response can minimize the chance of injury to all involved thus minimizing unnecessary expenses through liability or worker's compensation claims.

Just as firefighters are taught to reduce the effects of fire through proper utilization of water, so too must we continue to battle the effects of workplace violence through the effective use of proper communication and physical skill techniques. ■