

# Workplace Violence

## **The Issue:**

**Assault and threatening behavior have become daily occurrences in health care facilities, jeopardizing the safety and security of caregivers, patients and visitors; undermining recruitment and retention of staff; and increasing costs to the system.**

Thirty percent (30%) of HPAE members responding to a 2005 survey reported having suffered a physical or verbal threat or assault on the job in the past 5 years. In a 2006 Peter Hart national survey of hospital-based Registered Nurses and Radiology Technologists commissioned by AFT, 52% of Registered Nurses and 31% of Techs reported having personally experienced violence or physical harassment from patients or their families.

Nursing and health caregivers have reported being kicked, punched in the face, bitten, choked, hit with chairs and other objects, and threatened. Many changes in health care are contributing to this rise in violence, including an increasing numbers of patients frustrated by long waits for care and other barriers to prompt access; understaffing and the presence of gang members, drug or alcohol users, trauma patients and distraught family members in our emergency rooms.<sup>1</sup>

Violence in health care facilities impedes the recruitment and retention of staff; creates additional costs for health care facilities, including workers compensation costs, legal expenses, and property damage; disrupts operations, and destroys the trust our patients should have in the safety of their hospital.

We have had the two recent issues of violence against nurses. I think it happens more often than we realize and I think lack of security, lack of proper staff and lack of proper training adds to the problem. We are trying so hard to treat our patients as guests or customers we have forgotten how to keep our staff safe. I'm hopeful that our union's program on violence prevention will help our staff and management address the problem.

- Pam Reinhardt, RN

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**HPAE**



**SETTING THE  
STANDARD *for*  
HEALTH CARE**

HPAE/AFT/AFL-CIO

With no federal or state laws or regulations to prevent workplace violence, HPAAE is looking to the state legislature and collective bargaining to address the issue.

In New Jersey, HPAAE is leading the fight for violence prevention in healthcare facilities. Working with members of the state legislature, HPAAE is supporting legislation that would set statewide violence prevention standards for healthcare facilities. These standards include the creation of joint labor management violence prevention committees, ongoing risk assessment, improved security and – where necessary – additional security personnel, and reporting of workplace violence.

HPAAE is working with hospital managements to improve safety for caregivers and patients, including arranging for crisis intervention training for staff that regularly work with combative patients, and participating in a task force addressing various aspects of caregiver and patient safety.

preserve the safety of patient care, HPAAE continues to fight for safe nurse-to-patient ratios in our collective bargaining agreements, as well as provide adequate numbers of ancillary staff, limits on practices such as floating nurses from unit to unit and the overuse of agency nurses.

### **Endnotes:**

1. Guidelines for Preventing Workplace Violence for Health Care and Social Service Workers, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration. OSHA 3148-01R.

**Health Professionals  
and Allied Employees**

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