

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE IN HEALTHCARE ENVIRONMENTS

COURSE OUTLINE

- **Thousands of assaults occur every week.**
 - Victims can be punched and kicked, suffer physical and emotional trauma, and even die.
- **This type of behavior takes place all too often in healthcare facilities across the country...in hospitals, urgent care clinics, nursing homes, and doctor's offices.**
 - Healthcare workers can be attacked by patients, visitors and even other employees.
- **In addition to its human cost, workplace violence also prevents a facility from delivering quality care safely.**
- **Violence can occur anywhere people are together... including hospitals and other healthcare facilities.**
 - Almost three-quarters of all workplace assaults occur in healthcare settings.
 - Seventy percent of nurses say they have been physically or verbally attacked by their patients.
 - An estimated 80% of people who work in "emergency medicine" will experience some form of violence in the course of their career.
 - Healthcare facilities haven't escaped the epidemic of "active shooter" occurrences the country has been experiencing either.
- **Violence is a big problem in healthcare facilities because some of them, particularly emergency care centers, exist in an almost constant state of crisis.**
 - Patients, their family and friends, or other visitors can become frustrated and angry with waiting, questions about insurance or having to pay for treatment.
 - Some of them may be intoxicated or have psychological problems.
 - Others may have been brought in under arrest.
 - Intruders may be there to steal drugs, or gang members may try to attack rivals who are receiving treatment.
 - Healthcare employees can also get "stressed out", and may lash out physically at patients...or each other.

- **Workplace violence doesn't just hurt 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.
- **In the healthcare industry, the control and prevention of workplace violence must be a top priority.**
- **Workplace violence can obviously cause serious problems.**
 - But healthcare employers and their employees have a powerful resource for "fighting back".
- **In 2016, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) published "Guidelines For Preventing Workplace Violence for Healthcare and Social Workers".**
 - They recommend that each facility should create its own written Workplace Violence Prevention Program, which is built around five core elements.
- **The first element of a good Workplace Violence Prevention Program 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 the second element, and it is critically important.**
 - The potential situations where violence could occur have to be identified in order for solutions to be developed to address them.
- **Next comes "hazard prevention and control".**
 - Once potential "trouble spots" have been identified, employers need to implement appropriate measures to control or eliminate them.

- **The fourth element, "education and training", is extremely important as well.**
 - What types of situations are most likely to give rise to workplace violence.
 - What they can do to help guard against workplace violence.
 - What to do if workplace violence occurs.
- **"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 that may have developed and implement improved solutions when needed.
- **Your own knowledge is key to:**
 - Identifying situations in your job and locations in the facility that have the potential for violence.
 - Developing ways to address them.
- **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 additional sources of potential violence, you need to share this information with the people who manage your Violence Prevention Program.
- **Incidents of violence in healthcare facilities have become such a problem that in 2021 the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) issued a "Quick Safety" advisory.**
 - This advisory's goal is to limit conditions that could give rise to aggression and violence in healthcare settings.
- **It focused on incidents involving patients and their family members, and what healthcare workers should do to help prevent these incidents, including...**
 - Using clear and calm verbal communication when speaking with patients and their family members.
 - Avoiding overly technical healthcare terminology in their conversations.
 - Assuming a friendly "non-confrontational" attitude during their conversations.
 - Responding as quickly as possible to patients' problems and conditions, to help establish a trusting relationship.

- **The advisory also addressed...**
 - Setting clear limits for patients' behavior.
 - Establishing a calm physical environment by minimizing bright lighting, noise and loud conversations with employees.
 - Using risk assessment tools to detect a patient's or family's potential for violence.
 - Intervening in a potentially violent situation as early as possible to prevent escalation.
- **The commission took another significant step and created a set of "workplace prevention requirements" that hospitals must follow.**
 - These provide a framework to guide hospital management in developing strong "workplace violence prevention systems".
- **The first steps that hospitals must take is to provide employees with JCAHO's definition of what constitutes workplace violence. This includes...**
 - Verbal, nonverbal, written or physical aggression.
 - Threatening, intimidating, harassing or humiliating words or actions.
 - Bullying.
 - Sabotage.
 - Sexual harassment.
 - Physical assault.
 - Other behaviors of concern involving staff, licensed practitioners, patients or visitors.
- **The next step a facility must take is to conduct a "worksite analysis", identifying areas where workplace violence would be more likely to occur and the types of situations that could likely lead to violence.**
- **Policies and prevention of workplace violence must then be developed, starting with a "leadership oversight" process and including...**
 - Post-incident strategies.
 - Data collection and reporting systems.
 - Methods for analyzing incidents that have occurred and what caused them.
- **At this point, training and education come into play.**
 - Managers, clinical staff, security personnel and external law enforcement must all be educated as to their respective roles and responsibilities.

- **All staff need to be trained in how to deal with incidents of violence, such as...**
 - De-escalation techniques.
 - Non-physical intervention skills.
 - Physical intervention techniques.
 - Responding to an emergency incident.
 - Reporting workplace violence incidents.
- **Once these aspects of a Workplace Violence Prevention Program are set out, the management and oversight of the program must be spelled out. This means...**
 - Assigning a person who will maintain the program.
 - Establishing a process to support victims and witnesses who could be affected by incidents of workplace violence... including trauma and psychological counseling if it is necessary.
 - Defining responsibilities for leadership oversight.
 - Educating the appropriate people about the program and their roles in it.
- **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 more 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 even 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 surrounding area.**
- **Waiting rooms that are crowded or uncomfortable increase the likelihood that people who use them will get upset.**
 - To prevent this, these spaces should be designed to create an atmosphere that's welcoming, warm, 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.**
 - For example, high-risk patients could be transferred to another area in the facility that is more secure, or to a different facility altogether.
- **Employees who work behind counters have less freedom of movement than other healthcare workers...and as a result, 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.**
- **Once your Violence Prevention program has identified the potentials for violence that exists 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 teaching can be done in a classroom, over the internet, in live "walk-through" sessions or even one-on-one with a mentor.
- **This process will address basics such as:**
 - How workplace violence affects healthcare facilities.
 - The purpose as well as the content of your employer's Violence Prevention Program.
 - Your responsibilities under the program.

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- **Workplace violence can create serious problems for healthcare workers and their employers...but there are effective ways to prevent and control this type of behavior.**
- **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 Program".**
- **Employee participation is crucial to the success of any violence prevention program.**
- **If you are involved in an incidence of workplace violence, be sure to document the event, so your facility can find ways to prevent similar incidents 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 make your facility a safer place for patients, your coworkers...and yourself!**