

FACT SHEET: Work related violence and your safety

Violence against nurses and health workers is unacceptable. It not only has a negative impact on your psychological and physical well-being, it also affects your job motivation. As a consequence, violence compromises the quality of care and puts health-care provisions at risk. It often also leads to immense financial loss in the health sector.

The impact of work-related violence is far-reaching. Verbal abuse can cause significant psychological trauma and stress, even if no physical injury has occurred. This can include symptoms of depression, PTSD, drug and alcohol abuse and even chronic pain. Physical injuries that may be sustained range from minor scratches and bruises, through to far more serious injuries.

Exposure to patient-related violence can also affect the way you interact with patients. Generally nurses are naturally nurturing people, but abuse can result in feelings of less empathy, poor morale and quality of care can suffer. Unsurprisingly there's a link between violence experienced by nurses and subsequent adverse events in patients.

What is work-related violence and aggression?

Nurses and health workers can be exposed to violence and aggression from a range of sources including clients, consumers, patients, residents, visitors and members of the public.

Examples of work-related violence include, but are not limited to:

- biting, spitting, scratching, hitting, kicking
- pushing, shoving, tripping, grabbing
- throwing objects, damaging property
- using or threatening to use a weapon
- sexual assault.

Aggressive behaviour can include:

- verbal abuse and threats
- angry and hostile behaviour
- intimidation and insults
- shouting and swearing
- encroaching on someone's personal space, i.e. standing too close
- stamping feet, banging, kicking or hitting items.

Management of work-related violence and aggression

An employer must manage risks to workers psychological health and safety by eliminating, where possible, exposure to psychosocial hazards. Preventing and managing violence and aggression is part of this obligation in accordance with the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*.

Every health service workplace must provide a violence and aggression prevention policy, procedures and practices that should include:

- workplace violence and aggression is not acceptable and will not be tolerated
- appropriate action will be taken if violence occurs
- all nurses and health care workers should be aware of procedures for requesting police or security assistance and how to make a report to police about an assault following the incident
- reporting incidents is mandatory and based on a no-blame approach to investigation
- incidents will be investigated with a view to prevention and continuous improvement

- training and educating in the prevention and management of violence and aggression is tiered and based on exposure to risk, following work health and safety principles that are updated and ongoing
- evasive self-defence training should be provided as an adjunct to other initiatives to those most at risk. It should emphasise retreat and self-protection and be delivered by accredited experts
- Counselling services are made available as required.

What can you do?

If you or a colleague experience occupational aggression or violence it is important to know how to manage it and any emotional responses you may experience. Here are some tips that may assist:

- attend evasive self-defence and/or aggression prevention and management training provided by your workplace
- develop effective communication skills that will equip you to prevent aggression from escalating and create boundaries that create two-way communication
- read your organisation's policies on preventing and managing occupational violence
- avoid working in isolation, request additional support where required
- ensure relevant information about an aggressive patient is communicated during handovers or is conveyed to the Supervisor or Shift Manager
- work with patients and visitors to identify behavioural expectations surrounding service provision and the consequences if these are not met
- undertake risk assessments to proactively identify the potential for violence and be part of the process to put prevention strategies in place
- report potential risks to your manager and the occupational health and safety representative
- request updates to the environment so they are more secure (for example provide a 'safe room', remove potential weapons from the environment, install physical barriers and alarms)
- have access to reliable communication devices to contact support when needed, this may include personal duress alarms
- avoid the need to carry money or valuables
- discontinue care if you believe your personal safety is at risk and seek support
- seek support from your organisation's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider. If this is not offered, request it
- familiarise yourself with your organisation's incident reporting policies and procedures and report and record near misses and incidents
- let your family or friends know what happened so they can support you, and
- look after yourself and your colleagues.

Ensure that any incident of violence or aggression is documented so that you and your colleagues can access ongoing support. Even if you don't think you need support immediately after the incident, it is important to acknowledge injury and lingering emotional responses and seek support.

Important contact numbers

- | | |
|--|------------------------|
| ● Police – emergency 000 or for non urgent reports | 131 444 |
| ● NPAQ - workplace issues and support | 1300 CODE PH (2633 74) |
| ● QLD Workplace Health and Safety | 1300 362 126 |

Resources

Worksafe QLD - [Prevention and Management of Work Related Violence and Aggression in Health Services](#)
Worksafe QLD - [A Guide to Working Safely in Peoples Homes](#)