

SETON Healthcare Network

Safety Module for Non-Employees: Workplace Violence

We hear about workplace violence in healthcare--what does that mean? Often, it begins with an aggressive threat, made in frustration, and the situation can be calmed with early and appropriate intervention. However, it can also escalate to an actual act of violence. We do have a policy prohibiting anyone from bringing a weapon to our facilities, but our environment contains many objects that could be used as weapons, so it is important for you to know how to be safe.

What contributes to the potential for violence in healthcare workplaces?

The nature of our work, and the healthcare system itself

- highly specialized, with a confusing array of personnel
- highly technical, not always interpreted for patient/family
- may have significant delays, as we care for the sickest person first
- because each patient situation is different, outcomes cannot be guaranteed.

Patients/Families are in situations characterized by

- high stress, often an unexpected emergency
- circumstances beyond their control
- uncertain, but highly significant (perhaps life-altering), outcomes
- in outpatient/emergency areas, may be aggravated by use of alcohol/drugs.

This can be a volatile mix, with a high potential for frustration!

What should you do? You may not be able to control the situation, but you can control yourself:

- keep a calm and caring attitude
- avoid giving orders (“Sir, you just have to calm down”)—this is not helpful
- avoid arguing—just listen
- don’t match their threat with one of your own—it can escalate the situation quickly
- keep a safe personal distance, placed so that a quick exit is possible

You will need to use your judgment about whether to use the tactics above, or just exit the situation. If the situation seems volatile to you, take advantage of your non-employee status to exit, with a statement such as “I’m just a volunteer (or student) here, but I can see that you’re upset, so I’ll go find someone who can help resolve this situation.”

If, at any time, you need immediate help from Security, **dial “6666” and stay on the line to give your location.**

And last, but MOST important:

Report the incident to the person-in-charge right away. Department personnel alone may be able to resolve the situation, or they may need to get safety and security resources involved. In either case, **the key is quick and early intervention.**

Statement of Completion:

I have read the above information on workplace violence, and understand what I am to do if I encounter it.

Name (please print):

Signature:

Date of completion: