

BULLETIN

Safety at work is first priority

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SWORN AT, SPIT ON, HIT, BITTEN, STABBED...or worse! None of us accepted a career in health care to endure violence in our work ... but that is the reality of what can happen when you are a health care worker.

According to CBC investigative reporter David McKie in his presentation to HSAs occupational health and safety conference last fall, health care workers across Canada are bearing the brunt of this significant workplace problem. At the same conference, a WorkSafeBC representative confirmed that the health care and community social services sectors account for 40 per cent of all accepted violence claims, not including the many unreported incidents.

Under-reporting of violence by health care workers may be due to several factors, including:

- perceived tediousness of the reporting process
- violence has become normalized and accepted as "part of the job"
- self-blame... -I should have known better"
- employer -persuasion" against reporting in general.. e.g. there is no injury so why report?

The potential for violence is also addressed in the WCB Regulation and in our contracts. For example, in the health science professionals contract, article 38.04 outlines the employers responsibility to make information about a history of violent behaviour available. This parallels the WCB Regulation and the -right to know" contained therein.

The employer is required to perform risk assessments to ensure that controls are in place to minimize exposure to potential violence. Employers are required to have -working alone" policies in place that would cover all work areas, including risk assessments for clients homes before staff visit. Working alone policies must be considered in the risk assessments.

One approach to violence reduction is the new stop sign posters that you may have seen at various facilities. These warn of the potential consequences of threatening behaviour or language. Another approach that the violence committee in one health authority has discussed is to flag the charts of patients who have friends or family visitors who have exhibited inappropriate behaviour and language.

HSA has been working with other health care unions, employers and the Occupational Health and Safety Agency for Healthcare (OHSAH) to form Violence in the Workplace committees in addition to joint occupational health and safety committees. HSA is working to ensure that each health authority has its own violence committee. The health authorities violence committees and the provincial violence committee are overseeing many positive changes to decrease the potential for violence.

EMPLOYERS ARE RESPONSIBLE for ensuring worker health and safety. They are also responsible for making sure that employees know what controls are in place to keep workers safe, including safety from violence at work, whether the threat of violence comes from clients, families, or other staff. If you encounter a situation at your work that you believe has the potential to cause you harm, you may have the right to refuse

that work. Contact your supervisor and your safety steward to let them know your concerns. If you experience violence in your work, take appropriate measures for help. And dont keep it to yourself: report it. 

Heather Sapergia represents Region 10 on HSAs board of directors, and is chair of the unions occupational health and safety committee.

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180 East Columbia
New Westminster, BC V3L 0G7

Website
www.hsabc.org

Telephone 604-517-0994
1-800-663-2017