

BULLETIN

Violent incidents go underreported

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SURVEY OF MEMBERS REVEAL SOME BELIEVE VIOLENCE IS PART OF THE JOB

BY MARTY LOVICK

-VIOLENCE", ACCORDING TO WORKSAFEBC regulation 4.27, is the attempted or actual exercise by a person, other than a worker, of any physical force so as to cause injury to a worker, and includes and threatening statements or behaviour which gives a worker reasonable cause to believe that he or she is at risk of injury.

Members working in acute psychiatric units, long term care, mental health and addictions, and community mental health have long experienced significant problems with violence in the workplace. Earlier this year HSA surveyed members to find out more and completed 444 interviews.

The breakdown of responses by professions was

- acute care psychology: 40%
- community mental health: 30%
- mental health and addictions: 27%
- long term care: 3%

Highlights of the responses include:


- 139 people reported being the victims of violence at work; some as many as ten times over their career. Many were aware of cases that were unreported.
- 85% of respondents said they knew they had the right to refuse unsafe work but only a handful indicated they would do so.
- 75% said their supervisor encouraged them to report but only 50% of those reports resulted in action.
- Members identify staff to patient/client ratios as a problem given the rise in acuity and complexity.
- Members are concerned about problems with physical layout and the lack of policies and protocols.

The survey also revealed that members are underreporting incidents of violence because they:

- feel aggression and violence are part of the job
- put clients/patients first feel guilty for reporting
- are not supported when they do report

It is important that members report all incidents of violence, and that's why HSA is working with the health authorities and other employers to raise awareness of the need to prevent violence with proper training, supervision and policies. The union participated with several violence prevention committees and investigate individual cases on a site-by-site basis. When a risk assessment reveals the potential for violence in a particular workplace, members are reminded of the WorkSafeBC regulations which must be in place.

These regulations can be paraphrased as follows:

- The employer must establish procedures, policies and work environment arrangements to eliminate the risk to workers from violence, and if elimination of the risk is not possible, minimize the risk. (4.29)
- An employer must inform workers who may be exposed to the risk of violence of the nature and extent of the risk. (4.30)
- An employer must also provide information related to the risk of violence from persons who have a history of violent behavior and whom workers are likely to encounter in the course of their work. (4.30)
- An employer must instruct such workers in the means of recognition of the potential for violence, the policies and procedures which have been developed to minimize or control the risk, the appropriate response to incidents of violence including how to obtain assistance, and the procedures for reporting, investigating and documenting incidents. (4.30) 

When in doubt about a situation or work practice affecting health and safety at work and unable to receive adequate information on site, members can contact Marty Lovick for more information at mlovick@hsabc.org or 604-439-0994.

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