



OHS: Break the silence on violence

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A recent survey of emergency department staff at Abbotsford Regional Hospital indicated that more than half of those who had recently experienced violence on the job didn't report those events.

This finding supports other similar surveys and anecdotal evidence from HSA members indicating that underreporting of violence and aggression at work is a common problem all over the province. Considering that these types of injuries are increasing – with about 1000 violence-related WCB time loss injury claims filed last year – the fact that many more incidents go unreported is a significant concern for the union.

The issue of underreporting was a main topic of discussion at the recent RPN Summit on Violence Prevention held in October. The day-long solutions oriented summit, attended by more than 50 registered psychiatric nurses from around BC, featured presentations and hands-on workshops about the increasing prevalence of workplace violence in the health sector and followed up on a provincial summit with the Ministry of Health in April. That provincial meeting came about in response to a letter to Health Minister Terry Lake from HSA President Val Avery, expressing the urgent need to develop provincial level strategies for dealing with workplace violence and aggression towards health care workers.

Summit participants discussed a violence prevention best practices model, where actions to deal with workplace violence and aggression are based on a thorough understanding and analysis of root causes. Each factor contributing towards a violent event needs to be assessed so that recommendations and changes can be made to prevent reoccurrences and injuries. This can only happen when incidents are properly reported and documented.

Summit participants were asked about why so many incidents of violence and aggression go unreported. The answers to that question covered main themes such as uncertainty about how and what to report, but there was also a discussion about the troubling misunderstanding many members seem to have – that violence is

somehow part of a healthcare workers' job, that it should be expected and that it's a sign of weakness to report it.

There is a legal requirement to properly report all injuries due to violence or aggression at work, as well as events where there may not be an injury, but there was the potential for serious injury. All such incidents must be reported to a worker's supervisor and investigated. Direction provided by summit participants will help the union in the development of educational and campaign material on this important topic.

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