



WORKPLACE VIOLENCE STRATEGY – BEYOND LEGISLATION

BACKGROUND

Alaska’s hospitals have seen a significant increase in workplace violence in the last year, generally patient on caregiver or family member on caregiver violence. Staff report feeling unsafe in the workplace. Being kicked, punched, spit on or verbally threatened is not an acceptable workplace hazard. Unfortunately, for many of our nurses and other caregivers, this is the new normal.

There are many potential contributing factors to the current escalation in violence – substance abuse, the opioid crisis, legislative/administrative criminal justice reforms, the use of police and prosecutorial discretion, changes in the bail schedule and changes in Department of Corrections processes. Staff do not always call police when assaults occur, but when police are called to respond, the perpetrator is often cited and left on the premises. Hospitals want to deter assaults and to have perpetrators arrested and removed when an assault occurs.

In response to member concerns, ASHNHA has been devoting significant time to this issue. This is a complex issue requiring multiple solutions and tools to impact the problem. ASHNHA has formed a Workplace Violence Task Force, hired a consultant for three months, and focused on legislative solutions to reduce violence and raise public awareness of the issue.

Our legislative proposal is moving through the legislature. HB 312 has passed the House and is now moving to the Senate. This proposal is described in a separate briefing paper.

However, legislation is only one potential solution to the multifaceted problem. Equally important is the work hospitals are doing to ensure they have a comprehensive approach to prevent, identify, and deescalate violence. It is also critical to have a continuum of resources available so that people get access to behavioral health treatment and services they need in the community and do not end up in the hospital.

The Alaska Behavioral Health Association and the Alaska Nurses Association are potential partners. The Alaska Criminal Justice Commission would like ASHNHA to continue to engage with the Commission and the workgroups. There is an opportunity to leverage funding from the Alaska Mental Health Trust to take further action on this issue.

ASHNHA members and the workplace violence task force must decide on the priorities for action moving forward. The following is a list of potential actions discussed by the workplace violence task force.

ACTION

- Support hospitals in sharing best practices and challenges in a way that promotes learning from each other.
- Encourage all facilities to implement best practices to reduce aggressive behavior such as risk identification, environmental changes, staff education, data collection, facility culture and leadership, and incident response. Complete an annual gap analysis or risk assessment to ensure all critical elements are in place.
- Develop a training plan with an emphasis on train-the-trainer models to support member hospitals in training staff in de-escalation, crisis intervention, and reducing and managing violence and aggressive behavior.
- Develop hospital violence response plans that include reporting crimes against health care workers and comprehensive follow-up care for staff members who have been assaulted or threatened.
- Develop common definitions for workplace violence, near misses, intentional and unintentional violence that can be used by all interested facilities to better track data.
- Fully implement the Emergency Department Information Exchange (EDIE) to facilitate early identification of patients at risk for security events and utilize security alerts in the system to support communication across facilities.
- Continue dialogue with law enforcement, Department of Law, ACJC Arrest and Intoxication workgroup, hospital security personnel, and hospital leaders.
- Support hospitals' work with local law enforcement as they develop memorandum of agreements/understanding on how to work together to prevent violence and intervene when violence occurs. Agreements could include police shifts/timing of patrols, how police respond to hospitals, and what information hospitals will provide. This process could be lengthy but may help hospitals and law enforcement entities speak a common language.
- Provide training to health care staff on interaction with law enforcement, what to do if violence occurs, and the importance of reporting of incidents – “know your rights card.”
- Further develop a communication strategy to help the public and legislators become aware of workplace violence at healthcare facilities and the impact on the workforce.