

# PUBLICATION

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## **VIDEO: Workplace Violence in the Health Care Setting – Is Your Organization Prepared? [Ober|Kaler]**

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**Workplace violence is more common than you may think – is your health care facility prepared? Recently, The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) updated guidelines for workplace violence as it relates specifically to health care facilities. Why?**

### **Consider these staggering statistics:**

- Between 2011 and 2013, workplace assaults ranged from 23,000 to almost 26,000 each year.
- Approximately 70% of those assaults occurred in health care and social services settings.

“For health care workers, assaults comprised between 10 to 13 percent of workplace injuries compared to about three percent of injuries in private sector industries,” stated [Jennifer L. Curry](#), associate with Ober|Kaler's Employment Group.

Jennifer said that OSHA developed guidelines to assist employers in meeting their responsibilities under the OSH Act. Section 5(a)(1) of the OSH Act states: “Each employer shall furnish to each of its employees employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or likely to cause death or serious physical harm.”

### **OSHA defines workplace violence as:**

- Any physical assault, threatening behavior, or verbal abuse occurring in a work setting.
- Violence may occur at any location where an employee performs any work-related duty.

While workplace violence can occur between co-workers, it's certainly not uncommon for violence and harassment to also occur between patients, visitors and even strangers in a health care organization. Lack of employee education on workplace violence policies is one of the leading risk factors for violence occurring and being under reported in the health care field.

### **According to OSHA, examples of workplace violence include:**

- Verbal harassment, such as shouting, swearing and angry outbursts.
- Beatings/physical altercations
- Intimidation or harassment of any kind
- Threats
- Stabbings and/or gun violence or active shootings

“An angry employee who has a verbal outburst and punches a wall can be considered workplace violence as much as an employee who talks about guns they have at home or about bringing guns to work,” added Jennifer.

## 5 Components of a Workplace Violence Prevention Program

OSHA's updated guidelines also focus on the development of a comprehensive prevention program which should include five key components:

### 1. Management commitment and employee participation

- Management commitment, accountability and a zero tolerance policy on workplace violence are critical to a successful prevention program. Managers should actively communicate policies, provide on-going training and education opportunities as well as encourage employees to report all incidents.
- Employees can provide the best information on potential safety issues at your facility. Encourage employees to also provide input on your organization's workplace violence policies and procedures.
- Ensure that employees know there will be no reprisals for voicing concerns and reporting incidents and educate staff on procedures for reporting violence.

### 2. Worksite analysis

This is a step-by-step look at your facility to find existing or potential hazards for workplace violence, including an analysis of security capabilities. OSHA points out that regular employee surveys are effective in assessing safety threats or hazards.

### 3. Hazard prevention and control

Take a look at your health care organization's internal structure. Do specific tasks or positions contribute to hazards related to workplace violence? Identify potential hazards and conduct a threat assessment by creating an internal "Threat Assessment Team" or "Patient Assault Team."

### 4. Safety and health training

Employee education and training help ensure that all staff members are aware of potential hazards and how to protect themselves and their co-workers through your facility's established workplace violence policies and procedures.

### 5. Record keeping and program evaluation

This is an important step for identifying patterns of assaults, workplace injuries or near misses that could have been prevented. Record keeping and reporting also provide you with a measure of your program's success.

Health care facilities and their leaders should be up-to-date on new regulations and workplace violence guidelines. Organizations can get more information on how to protect their health care facility against workplace violence by contacting:

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