

Workplace Violence in Health Care Is a National Epidemic

Workplace violence against health care workers, including emergency nurses, is a national crisis. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) found that although workers in the health care sector accounted for only 20% of workplace injuries, they make up about 50% of all victims of workplace assault. Between 2002 and 2013, serious incidents of workplace violence were four times more common for workers in the health care sector than for all other workers in the U.S.

Workers in the **health care** sector make up about



Across the country, nurses and other health care workers are punched, kicked, spat on, stabbed or shot daily. Some even die from their injuries. Many suffer physical and emotional trauma that drives them away from the critical work of emergency nursing. A survey of emergency nurses revealed that 33% have considered leaving the profession due to workplace violence. Most incidents go unreported. Fewer get prosecuted.

Emergency Departments Experience Violence at Higher Rates

Unfortunately, assaults directed at workers occur at especially high rates in emergency departments (EDs), which are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Moreover, under federal law EDs are required to treat all patients. Health care professionals in the ED interact with members of the public when emotions are running high and behavior can sometimes become violent. Studies show that emergency nurses and other ED personnel experience a violent event about once every two months. As a result, emergency nurses are more likely to experience acute stress than other nurses.

Despite Trends, There Is No National Standard to Prevent Workplace Violence in Health Care

Although federal research demonstrates that workplace violence is a serious concern for the nation's 15 million health care workers, there is no national standard in place aimed at preventing and responding to workplace violence in health care facilities. A national standard relating to workplace violence in health care would ensure that

employers assess factors such as the physical security of their facilities, staffing issues related to security, training for employees on mitigating and responding to violence, and support for workers when they are assaulted. A national standard developed by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) would ensure that all health care employers take steps to protect their workers from violence and support them when assaults do occur.

The Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act (H.R. 1309/S. 851)

H.R. 1309/S. 851 will ensure that health care and social service employers across the country take specific steps to prevent workplace violence and ensure the safety of patients and workers. This legislation directs the Secretary of Labor, through OSHA, to require these employers to develop and implement workplace violence prevention plans that are worker-driven and comprehensive. In developing and implementing a workplace violence prevention plan, a covered employer would:

- Develop processes to identify and respond to risks and hazards that make settings vulnerable to violence
- Implement protocols to document and investigate violence
- Create an environment that supports employees who report incidents of violence, including non-retaliation policies
- Ensure that employees are appropriately trained in identifying and addressing hazards, as well as their rights with respect to workplace violence

To lower the risks associated with workplace violence in health care, we must take steps to address its root causes and mitigate its effects. The Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act (H.R. 1309/S. 851) will ensure that emergency nurses and other health care workers have a safe working environment and receive support in addressing the widespread problem of workplace violence in health care.

House Request: Cosponsor and Support the Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act (H.R. 1309).

H.R. 1309 was introduced by Rep. Joe Courtney (D-CT) on February 19, 2019.

Senate Request: Cosponsor and Support the Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act (S. 851).

S. 851 was introduced by Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) on March 14, 2019.