

I am writing to tell you about some of the things I have experienced while working as an RN at the Oregon State Hospital over the course of the last 5 years. I want you to know that I don't feel that all of our clients should get criminal charges for assaulting health care workers. Some of our clients are truly destabilized, paranoid, scared and psychotic. But it is my regret to inform you that the majority of the assaults that I have witnessed, and make no mistake, there have been many, were perpetrated by individuals who showed clear and consistent ability to not only know the difference between right and wrong, but also showed clear and consistent ability to control their behavior in situations where there was a significant benefit to do doing so.

I have seen health care workers assaulted on many an occasion through no fault of their own. I have seen people get slapped, kicked in the face, punched in the nose, bones broken, concussions caused. I have witnessed chairs thrown at health care workers, pens used as weapons to stab a Health care worker in the face. After these assaults I have seen no consequences dealt, I have heard patients brag about the assaults, knowing there would be no consequences.

Currently, at the Oregon State Hospital, the very word, "consequence," is a shameful word that isn't spoken except in hushed tones behind closed doors. Even the natural consequences for such violent behaviors have been removed from the environment so that Patients currently have no reason to refrain from assaulting nursing staff members. Many times, patients are admitted directly from the state prison, and at first they are afraid to act violently for fear that they will receive new charges. But they quickly learn that there is no reason in their new therapeutic environment to be fearful of that. They see their peers hit, kick, scratch and throw objects at people in anger and go out on off grounds community passes days after the incident. The staff remain therapeutic with the patient, continue to treat the assaulting individual with the utmost respect and dignity, continue to smile and meet the persons demands as they are made. Patients have literally told me that nothing will happen to them if they bash in my skull. And I have lamented the fact that what they said to me is true. I could literally be maimed by an angry person, and that person would be free from any consequences whatsoever.

The result is an environment in which violence is normalized. Staff members are often shamed into denying that any trauma resulted at all. It is frowned upon if they decide to take time off after being involved in an incident of violence. Violence is supposedly something you must accept and expect. There is something very devastating about working in such an environment. It is a very toxic thing to come to believe that you are not only a health care worker, serving a population that is largely forgotten by the public, but also to believe that part of that duty means being a punching bag for them to release their anger and their pain, and that somehow this is supposed to be okay.

There are some patients who would not be concerned with criminal charges. There are those who are too sick to be concerned about it. But there are many who know full well what criminal charges would mean, and who would control themselves if it meant avoiding such charges. Since the majority of on the job injuries At the Oregon State Hospital are caused by patient encounters and the majority of these assaults are perpetrated by people who possess the ability to control their actions, I believe

passing this bill would reduce the number of assaults overall. That is worthwhile. Nurses and other health care workers go to work each day and worry that today could be the day that someone maims or even kills them. This is our reality. As a society, we have a responsibility to stand up for and protect the public servants whose jobs are necessary to the greater good of our communities.

We have units which are maximum security in which workers are highly trained and units are staffed appropriately to handle violence safely. Because of their staffing levels and the training they receive, they are often able to contain violent patients before major injuries are sustained. The only way for patients to be transferred to these maximum security units are if patients have criminal charges. Currently, it is very difficult to have violent patients moved to maximum security units because it is a forensic program within the hospital. The result is that very violent patients remain on minimum security units where they are able to injure both health care workers and other patients much more easily.

Please consider passing this bill for the safety of the every day heroes who consistently do the work that few are able to tolerate. We try to teach our patients how to function in communities, we try to show them that they are valid, that their pain is valid, and teach them how to express themselves in skillful ways. We tell them that violence is not okay, but we show them that it really is.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,
Faith Faddis, RN