

HB 2620: Preventing health care worker workplace violence



Problem: Health care workers are nearly four times more likely to be injured as a result of workplace violence than all workers in the private sector combined.¹ In a survey of nearly 3,500 registered nurses, approximately 25% of the responders had experienced physical violence over 20 times in the previous three years. Nearly 20% reported encountering verbal abuse more than 200 times in that same time frame.² Mental health and emergency units are most vulnerable to violence.³ Workplace violence in health care settings not only puts nurses and other health care workers at increased risk, it also limits the care health care workers can provide to patients.

Solution: We support HB 2620 and strongly encourage your consideration of other evidence based policies to help identify root causes and deter acts of violence in health care settings. HB 2620 makes knowingly assaulting a health care worker a Class C felony. This is one piece of a comprehensive approach to address and prevent instances of violence against health care workers.

Studies show the most effective way to limit work place violence is to enact comprehensive workplace violence prevention programs that include management commitment and employee involvement, hazard data analysis, violence controls, employee training, and recordkeeping and evaluation.⁴ An overall commitment to ensuring a safer workplace by hospital administrators, managers and hospital security is key⁵ which is why seven states have enacted laws requiring comprehensive workplace violence prevention programs.⁶

Collecting and reporting data on violence and security precautions are critical elements of violence prevention.⁷ Underreporting creates a significant barrier to determining the actual depth and cause of the problem, and makes meaningful and effective solutions challenging to identify and implement.

OSHA cites inadequate security and mental health personnel on site as a cause for workplace violence in hospitals.⁸ Since mental health and emergency departments are particularly vulnerable to abuse – in one study over 50% of the participating emergency department nurses experienced verbal or physical violence at work⁹ -- increased security measures to target these particularly vulnerable areas is needed.

Our forthcoming proposed amendment will require health care employers to record and report all incidences of assault against a health care worker to the Oregon Health Authority and the Legislature, and requires all hospitals to maintain at least one security personal at all times in emergency and mental health departments.

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). (2013). Nonfatal occupational injuries and illnesses requiring days away from work, 2012

² Papa, A., Venella, J., (January 31, 2013) "Workplace Violence in Healthcare: Strategies for Advocacy"

³ AFT. Stop the Violence: Reclaiming the promise of high-quality healthcare.

⁴ Occupational Safety and Health Administration. (2004). *Guidelines for preventing workplace violence for health care & social service workers*.

⁵ Papa, A., Venella, J.

⁶ American Nurses Association (2014). Workplace violence.

⁷ McPhaul, K., London, M., Lipscomb, J., (January 31, 2013) "A Framework for Translating Workplace Violence Intervention Research into Evidence-Based Programs"

⁸ OSHA., (December 2015) "Preventing Workplace Violence: A Roadmap for Healthcare Facilities"

⁹ Papa, A., Venella, J.