

March 6, 2017

To Whom it May Concern:

My name is Jennifer Derr and I work as a Mental Health Associate at Providence Portland Medical Center in Portland, Oregon. I work on an inpatient, locked psychiatric unit. However I am currently on injury leave due to an assault by a patient. I would like to express my support for HB 2620 by telling my story of how I was assaulted by a patient while working my shift.

I was out on my unit when a patient asked if he could have another packet of hot cocoa. This would be fine, but he had just received one from another nurse and I was asking him what happened to the one he was just given. He told me it all spilt in his room when he was trying to get hot water out of the faucet in his bathroom. I then proceeded in telling him that he did not have to get hot water out of his bathroom and that we had coffee and water for tea in our day room for whenever he wanted it. The patient was agitated for most of the morning, and I was being polite to him and trying to ensure him of some comforts by showing him the beverage station. A few minutes after I showed him the beverage station he came walking towards me with a paper bowl (assuming it was from his breakfast try). The paper bowl was filled with fluid that was eventually thrown at my face from a distance of a couple feet away. I then realized it was hot coffee that had just been brewed. I was wearing my glasses, but even with them on I suffered at least twenty burns to my cornea and first degree burns to the left side of my face. I was the only staff on the floor at the time and I could not get immediately to safety as the patient was blocking the nurses stations door. I was completely panicked as I could barely see. The patient proceeded to yell at me, "Look what you made me do!", and then went down the hall the opposite way of the nursing station. I was able to run into the nursing station and began dowsing myself with cold water. I was then taken to the Emergency Department for treatment.

There was no warning that the patient was going to assault me. I was doing my job treating him with respect and kindness. Nothing I did was unsafe. However, I was on the floor alone by myself on a high risk unit. We have security at our hospital, but they are accessible to us as needed per code.

I support the Health Bill 2620 and believe there should be stronger penalties for the assaults and violent acts towards healthcare workers. Healthcare workers are put into vulnerable and sometimes dangerous positions when trying to seek the best care for our

patients. I was not only physically but emotionally scared that day. I keep telling myself it was only coffee, but it was much more. I was taught that my work environment is not safe! There are not any repercussions for the violence I have endured as a healthcare worker at my hospital. Even though I filed assault charges towards the patient, he was kept in the hospital on a medical hold then released. He has yet to be arrested. He most likely will not be charged with a felony and my never be held accountable for his actions.

Healthcare workers need to be kept safer at work. Collecting continual data on acts of violence, having adequate around the clock security on high risk units and keeping our patients accountable for their actions will be a start in ensuring a much safer working environment. All of which are included in the support of HB 2620.