

Developing a Violence Prevention Program for Senior Care Facilities

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Healthcare workers in senior care facilities face a significant risk of workplace violence. This violence can occur among staff, residents, and visitors, or it can be started by someone outside of the facility who may be an armed intruder. To address this challenging reality, senior care facilities should develop written violence prevention programs that outline plans for maintaining facility security and protecting employees and residents.

Each organization's program should specify how healthcare workers should respond when an incident occurs and delineate the proper reporting and documentation procedures. Healthcare workers who are trained and skilled to deal with workplace violence should lead the program. Through leadership and management support and the provision of appropriate resources, healthcare workers can develop the expertise necessary to deal with violent incidents.

Assessing the Facility

One of the first steps in establishing a program is to conduct a violence risk assessment of the facility that pinpoints areas of actual or potential security hazards for violence. These potential hazards should be analyzed so risk-reduction strategies can be devised to counteract them.

Local law enforcement may also be helpful in not only identifying security hazards in your facility, but also in suggesting ways to prevent and mitigate violence.

Assessing Residents

Some of the potential violence in senior care facilities may emanate from residents. As part of establishing a violence prevention program, facility leadership should consider how to assess residents for potentially violent or aggressive behavior.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides the following [risk assessment tools](#) to assist:

- Triage Tool (assesses a resident's potential danger from others or to themselves)
- Danger Assessment Tool (assesses the risk to nurses and other healthcare workers of a resident who shows signs of potentially dangerous behavior)
- Indicator for Violent Behavior Tool (list of five observable behaviors that indicate danger to others)¹

Other assessment tools include the [Modified Overt Aggression Scale](#), which is a tool that rates verbal, physical, and auto aggressions as well as aggression against property.² The [Broset Violence Checklist](#) and [Violence Risk Screening-10](#) measure aggressiveness in residents with acute mental illness so employees can anticipate incidents before they occur. Using these tools or a variation of them may help organizations be more cognizant and vigilant of individuals who have aggressive or dangerous tendencies or behaviors.

Establishing a Program

Another step in establishing a violence prevention program is for facility leadership to seek input from healthcare workers who interact with residents, families, visitors, and other healthcare providers every day. These workers might provide valuable suggestions for reducing or eliminating potential risks. Some elements of a facility's violence prevention program might include the following:

- Physical and administrative safeguards, such as appropriate staff-to-resident ratios, guidelines for working alone, alarms and monitoring devices, secured entrances, and trained security personnel
- Emergency response measures, including de-escalation techniques and communication strategies for crisis situations (including incident follow up)
- Reporting and investigative processes, including procedures for documenting all violent occurrences and reporting them to appropriate authorities as required by law³

A senior care facility's violence prevention program also should include a "zero-tolerance policy that effectively establishes the standards of behavior that are expected of everyone at a

community . . . The written policy should define violent and abusive behaviors — for instance, physical, verbal and psychological forms of aggression and harassment — and expressly state that violence in any form will not be tolerated.”⁴ Managers, supervisors, coworkers, clients, patients, residents, families, and visitors should be made aware of this policy.

Preparing and Educating Healthcare Workers

Another step in developing a violence prevention program is to educate healthcare workers. To deal effectively with any threatening behavior, healthcare workers need resources, motivation, and support. They should be trained in how to protect themselves, coworkers, residents, and visitors through established policies and procedures that specify actions that should be taken in the event of an incident.

Healthcare workers should also be educated about the proper reporting procedures and encouraged to report incidents promptly. Most importantly, they should be assured that they will receive no reprisals for reporting.

Leadership should ensure that healthcare workers in the organization learn de-escalation techniques including active listening, effective verbal responding, redirecting, positioning, controlling the environment, and more. Other potential areas that training should cover include:

- Risk factors that cause or contribute to violence
- Early recognition of escalating behavior or recognition of warning signs or situations that trigger combative behavior in residents
- Ways to prevent or diffuse volatile situations or aggressive behavior, manage conflicts and emotions, and use medications properly as chemical restraints

Video Resource

Specific strategies for dealing with the violence associated with an active shooter/armed intruder in a senior care facility can be obtained from this educational video located at the bottom of MedPro’s [senior care webpage](#). Produced by Willis Towers Watson in consultation with Sorensen, Wilder and Associates, this video shows an active shooter/armed intruder simulation at a senior care facility. Senior care operators will find this a valuable resource to share with all staff at their facilities.

- A standard response action plan for violent situations, including the availability of assistance, response to alarm systems, and communication procedures
- Methods to deal with hostile people other than residents and clients, such as family members and visitors
- The location and operation of safety devices, such as alarm systems, along with the required maintenance schedules and procedures
- Ways to protect oneself and coworkers, including use of a buddy system
- Information on multicultural diversity to increase staff sensitivity to racial and ethnic issues and differences
- Policies and procedures for obtaining medical care, counseling, workers' compensation, or legal assistance after a violence episode or injury⁵

To reinforce violence prevention training, organization leaders should conduct drills or simulations so healthcare workers can practice responses to volatile situations. Walking through the steps learned in training will give workers a hands-on approach to execute the appropriate response during an incident. Drills also might help identify risks that were not addressed in training and identify potential logistical or equipment issues.

An evaluation should be included in a training program. Facility leadership and/or the training leader should review its content, methods, and frequency of training annually. Supervisor and employee interviews may be involved as well as testing, observing, and reviewing reports of behavior of individuals in threatening situations.⁶

Documenting Incidents and Maintaining Records

A major part of a facility's violence prevention program is the documentation and recordkeeping of violence. All healthcare workers should be apprised of the facility's policies and procedures for the reporting and recordkeeping of incidents.

When an incident does occur, healthcare workers should be encouraged to report it promptly. For the program to succeed, healthcare workers need assurance that they will receive no reprisals for reporting any incident.

Documentation in a violence prevention program may include these types of records:

- Records of incidents of abuse, verbal attacks, or aggressive behavior that may be threatening.
- Information on residents with a history of past violence, drug abuse, or criminal activity recorded in their health records. All staff members that care for potentially aggressive or abusive residents should be aware of these individuals' backgrounds.
- Medical reports of work injury and supervisors' reports for each recorded assault (type of assault, who was assaulted, related circumstances).
- Records of discussions at safety committee meetings and records of hazard analyses (including corrective actions recommended and taken).
- Records of all training programs, attendees, and trainers' qualifications.⁷

In Summary

Senior care facilities, like other healthcare facilities, face the challenge of preparing for, managing, reporting, and documenting workplace violence. Devising a violence prevention program in which a facility assesses its risks, trains its healthcare workers, and reports and documents violent incidents may help mitigate potential violence. Finally, each senior care facility's leadership should convey to its employees that ensuring their safety and health is as important as serving its residents.

Resources

- [Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality: Reducing Workplace Violence with TeamSTEPS®](#)
- [Minnesota Department of Health: Prevention of Violence in Health Care Toolkit](#)
- [Occupational Safety and Health Administration: Guidelines for Preventing Workplace Violence for Healthcare and Social Service Workers](#)
- [The Joint Commission: Workplace Violence Prevention Resources](#)

Endnotes

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Workplace violence prevention for nurses*. Retrieved from www.cdc.gov/wpvhc/Course.aspx/Slide/Unit6_8

² American Academy of Pediatrics. (2010). *Addressing mental health concerns in primary care: A clinician's toolkit*. Retrieved from <https://depts.washington.edu/dbpeds/Screening%20Tools/Modified-Overt-Aggression-Scale-MOAS.pdf>

³ Doherty, D. (2019, July 29). Resident-initiated incidents: 5 tips for long-term care facilities to create safe environments. *McKnight's Senior Living*. Retrieved from www.mcknightsseniorliving.com/home/columns/guest-columns/resident-initiated-incident-5-tips-for-long-term-care-facilities-to-create-safe-environments/

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Occupational Safety and Health Administration. (2015). *Guidelines for preventing workplace violence for healthcare and social service workers*. Retrieved from www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3148.pdf

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Wilder, S. (2013). Minimizing workplace violence in LTC facilities. *iAdvance Senior Care*. Retrieved from www.iadvanceseniorcare.com/article/minimizing-workplace-violence-ltc-facilities

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