



MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY: Prevention of work-related injuries & illnesses through research & investigation

INVESTIGATION/RESEARCH

Stop Work-Related Assaults in the Health Care Setting

In 2012 and 2013, eleven health care workers were assaulted and sustained a skull fracture at work in Michigan. A skull fracture is a small percentage of all traumatic brain injuries (TBI) [20% of TBI cases that require hospitalization have a skull fracture]. Data is not available on work-related traumatic injuries without a fracture. Examples of the work-related assaults that occurred:

- A 42-year-old female employee of a hospital was punched in the face by a patient and sustained a comminuted nasal fracture.
- A 50-year-old male security guard at a hospital was punched in the face by a patient.
- A 28-year-old female registered nurse at a hospital sustained a nasal fracture after being hit in the nose and forehead by a patient.
- A 47-year-old female registered nurse at a hospital was punched in the face by a psychiatric patient who she was discharging home.
- A 41-year-old female employee of a nursing home was assaulted by a patient.

IN ORDER TO PREVENT SIMILAR INCIDENTS IN THE FUTURE

- **Health care employers should recognize** that workplace violence is a safety and health hazard.
- **Health care employers should provide health and safety training** on how to be protected from potential hazards.
- **Health care employers should keep records, evaluate and when appropriate modify** their violence prevention program to ensure effectiveness.
- **Get involved!** Health care workers should familiarize themselves with their organization's workplace violence prevention programs and policies.
- **Health care workers should be attuned to patient behaviors** as most violent behaviors are preceded by warning signs, including verbal and behavioral cues, e.g. tone and volume of voice, staring and eye contact, anxiety.
- **Health care workers should be aware of their responses and feelings.** Workers should be aware that the way they express themselves can have a significant effect on how patients respond.
- **Health care employers/employees should identify and assess hazards** that may lead to incidents of workplace violence and **prevent or control the hazards** that have been identified.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Facial bones were the location of all fractures from assaults in health care.
- Females (63.6%) were twice as likely as males to be assaulted.
- The average age of assaulted workers was 36; the median age was 30.
- Work-related assaults were more likely to occur in the summer months (June-August).
- Workers' Compensation was the expected payer for 72.7% of cases.
- All assaulted workers were treated in the emergency department.

Guidelines for Preventing Workplace Violence for Health Care and Social Workers:

<https://www.osha.gov/Publications/osh3148.pdf>

Preventing Violence in the Health Care Setting:

http://www.jointcommission.org/assets/1/18/sea_4_5.pdf

Workplace Violence Prevention for Nurses:

http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/violence/training_nurses.html

MSU Occupational and Environmental Medicine:

www.oem.msu.edu