

Project Safe Workplace: A Healthcare System's Approach to Workplace Violence Prevention

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Objectives

Workplace violence is a safety issue faced every day by healthcare workers across the United States while caring for patients and their families. In 2017 the estimated rate of injuries due to workplace violence that resulted in days away from work for healthcare employees was 8.0 per 10,000 in the United States, compared to 1.9 per 10,000 workers in the private sector. Addressing behavioral issues in the non-behavioral setting is a challenge that can result in unsafe, disruptive, or violent conduct.

Saint Luke's completed a qualitative study and a two-year retrospective review of incidents in 2016. Nurses were more affected by workplace violence than any other role. Staff were unaware if their facility had prevention resources and comments revealed staff tended to under-report workplace violence, citing: 1) it is part of the job; 2) nothing will change, and 3) the reporting process is cumbersome. At the time, tools and policies for workplace violence prevention were fragmented and did not address all areas of the Saint Luke's Health System. Many employees did not know what to do when confronted with a workplace violence situation. The goal of this project was to create a standardized process for reporting workplace violence, intervention, and education.

Planning/Research Methods

Saint Luke's Health System leadership answered the call by establishing a multidisciplinary task force guided by a steering committee, focused on the standardization of workplace violence prevention. A literature review of best practices was conducted, including resources from The Joint Commission and OSHA. Also, internal policies, procedures, and data were evaluated. Similar organizations were interviewed during the knowledge-gathering process.

Strategy and Implementation

In 2019, the task force implemented the following: (1) a system policy; (2) systemized infrastructure to oversee initiatives, training, incident review, and data tracking; (3) multidisciplinary Crisis Intervention Response Teams (CIRT); (4) education and resources to be made available to all employees; (5) clinical guidelines and order sets for caring for the confused, delirious, or agitated patient and alcohol withdrawal patients; (6) procedures for supporting impacted employees; and (7) simplified reporting processes with the burden removed from the affected employee.

Results

Saint Luke's Health System has accomplished much in the way of workplace safety since beginning this journey in 2016. All system entities and departments have the same resources and tools, which is providing a safer work environment.

Reporting of workplace violence events increased by 56% across the system in 2019 compared to 2018. The Crisis Identification and De-Escalation course was completed by 473 Critical Incident Response Team members, which gave them the tools to keep staff, patients, and families safe during a workplace crisis. Online safety classes that included conflict resolution, aggression recognition, and intervention, the crisis cycle, and empathy were completed by 9,354 employees. An additional 11,123 employees completed online training on crisis intervention basics, bullying, lateral violence, and prevention and communication skills.

At the end of 2019 feedback was elicited from frontline staff. Some of the feedback included: 1) "It was nice not to be responsible for workplace violence incident reporting after I was just involved in an incident;" 2) "The debriefing and post huddles have been very helpful;" 3) "I feel supported by my organization when a workplace violence event occurs."

In November 2019, our system CEO attended the World Hospital Congress in Muscat, Oman as an American Hospital Association delegate. She spoke about Saint Luke's Health System's Project Safe Workplace. The information was well-received by peers from around the world, with many asking for copies of the toolkit. Project Safe Workplace allows the staff to work within a safe atmosphere promoting positive outcomes for our patients and families.