

Violence In Healthcare

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I loved every part of being a nursing assistant until I had the opportunity to peek at the behind the scenes of what healthcare is really like. And the amount of violence healthcare workers experience while working. This made me change my whole perspective of my job. The article “How The Hidden Epidemic of Violence Against Nurses Affects Health Care”, written by the author Jason Blomquist, explains that a part of health care that is very often overlooked is the amount of violence that a nurse may experience in her career and how this may affect her as well as the care she provides. The author also expresses a deep concern for the lack of clarity that there is in the term “workplace violence” in a healthcare environment. I believe this author has a significant point. I not only agree with the author’s statements throughout this article, I also relate as a current healthcare worker with the long term plans of joining the nursing field. It is very important to start advocations for safe work environments, and much like the author mentions. That starts with identifying what “violent” behavior looks like. Creating a safe, effective, and discrete way of reporting any incidents even if the event seems minor. Another aspect of workplace violence that is often overlooked is how what the effect of an unsafe workplace has on the healthcare worker. Sometimes it doesn’t stop there. Along with many other effects that workplace violence causes, patient care is not the best care when the care provider is afraid things can get violent and has very little support, or simply caring for a different patient after experiencing workplace violence looks different.

When we hear the word “violent” most of us think of hard punches, screaming, yelling, chaos, and other extreme behaviors. I believe the healthcare industry has done a really poor job at educating their staff, partners, and colleagues that violence can come in many forms. It can also look like harassment. Maybe it is a resident saying something directed to you in an inappropriate manner. Maybe there is no screaming or yelling but they are quiet threats, or any type of inappropriate grabbing. It is incredibly easy to second guess if certain scenarios are violent enough to be reported. I can confidently say that a big percentage of healthcare workers are not aware or do not know what to consider violence. I say this because of my personal experience in the health care industry. I achieved my nursing assistant certification when I was sixteen years old. My first job as a CNA was in a transitional care unit where people recovered from injuries, surgeries, and patients that came from hospitals and just needed some more care before they felt well enough to go home. This particular TCU was connected to a long term care facility. As nursing assistants in these facilities, we do the majority of patient care, from waking them up, getting them dressed, brushing their hair and

teeth, to dressing them in pajamas and tucking them into bed. Mental disorders such as Dementia, Alzheimer's, and many more are very common in these work places. Although we are interacting with these patients constantly throughout the required course for the nursing assistant certification, there was little to no conversation about workplace violence. I remember my first experience in a violent situation, I had no idea what to do, and not only that but I had no idea how to go about reporting it. Unfortunately this is the case for many healthcare workers.

Along with the other causes, justifying an incident is another reason incidents go unreported. It is easy to make the incident small and not feel the need to report it. I believe this is because there is no easy way of reporting an incident. Many times the care provider gets blamed for the situation, even when they have no control. Often when incidents are reported, healthcare workers are asked the insulting question of "what could you have done differently?" When it is put into this context it can cause the individual placing the report to feel like they have no support from their employer, it might even make them worry they will be in trouble for reporting. On the other hand, there is also no easy way to make a "small" report. Usually healthcare workers feel as if the incident should not be reported if no consequences came from the incident, or if it was a calm or short interaction. The article "Nurses Rational For Under Reporting of Patient and Visitor Perpetrated Workplace Violence: A Systematic Review". Published by the national library of medicine states, "Only 12% of events were formally reported". (Spencer et al., 2023). The article also states that this is because of the fear nurses have on the consequences of the report. This means that 88% of incidents, big or small are going unreported. This is an alarming number that points out that something needs to change, therefore I would argue that health care workers deserve more support from their employees to have the ability of making a report without fearing the outcome.

We often don't stop to think how these violent situations impact care providers. It is no secret that these situations are quite frequent for nurses and other health care workers. Many would consider it a part of their job description. However, the impact that this takes on them as care providers, on their other patients, and even their home life is not talked about enough. It is so important that nurses take care of themselves to be able to take care of their patients. Sometimes their own health and concerns are overlooked or unconsidered. Nurses are known for not taking their lunch break, for not getting enough sleep. All of these are basic human needs and a safe environment to work in does not fall short to that category. The effects of an unsafe work place don't

end there. It is also affecting patient care. The article “Understanding Nurse Anxiety For Better Engagement and Productivity”. published by DROPSTAT (2023) claims, “Increased risk of adverse events, increased patient anxiety, delayed care, and decreased communication” are all effects that a nurse in a unhealthy and violent work environment, has on patients. An aspect that is not as unique to the health care industry but very commonly seen in this field is the violence that comes from non patients. A common sentence in health care, specifically in the nursing field is the phrase “nurses eat their young.” It is very common for nurses to take advantage of their coworkers, especially targeting the younger nurses. Although it is commonly missed, these are also acts of violence that can and should be reported. The culture that has been implied into the health care industry, especially in long term care facilities, is truly affecting how nurses perceive their jobs. Healthcare workers learn very quick to come into work with a guard on because most coworkers don’t want to watch you succeed. I personally caught onto this very quickly as a sixteen year old nursing assistant. I remember sitting in a group with other young nursing assistants discussing the shared experiences we had. One of the stories that stuck with me was the story of one of my now best friend. She shared with us the story of her first week as CNA. Two older nursing assistants which were assigned to train her on this particular week asked if she would bring a patient water. Without a problem, she grabbed a glass of water and brought it into the room. When she walked in, the patient had already passed away. My friend who was an inexperienced nursing assistant had no idea what to do, when she left the room to get help from her trainers, it was evident that they knew and this was evidently performed with the intentions of scaring my friend. The saddening part is that this isn’t the only CNA I have heard a similar story from. This is considered violence and needs to be reported.

Violence has a vague definition. It is difficult to put an exact finger on what violence looks like. Overlooking, justifying, feeling uncomfortable, and not having access to a proper way of reporting are all things that shouldn’t be normalized within the healthcare industry. As I continue to peruse a career in healthcare I can definitely say my guard is up. I have learned to defend myself understand that no matter what happens I have to document anything and everything despite the fear of making every shift uncomfortable. I considered other careers despite my passion for taking care of people. This wouldn’t be the case of facilities protected their healthcare workers more. Throughout this essay I have learned that it is going to take a lot for this culture that has been in place for several years to change. But as individuals we can make little changes that go along way. We can start by reporting every incident little or not.

References

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