

Workplace violence: The hidden danger for health care professionals

The psychiatric patient showed up to the hospital at about 1:30 p.m., nearly an hour early for his appointment. According to [National Public Radio](#), colleagues heard arguing and saw the patient pointing a gun at his psychiatrist. They called 911, but the shooting started at about 2:30 p.m.

According to NPR, the psychiatrist told police that the patient pulled a gun from his waistband and killed the caseworker who was present. The psychiatrist, who was grazed by bullets, said he went behind a chair, pulled a gun and shot at the patient six or seven times. The patient was hospitalized. Police said he had 39 unused bullets in his possession when he was wrestled to the ground.

The psychiatrist's decision to carry a weapon at work may have been unusual. After all, health care professionals are not law enforcement officers, and hospitals and medical clinics frequently have gun-free policies. But workplace violence is not unusual in the health care profession.

In fact, health care workers have "remarkably high rates of injuries due to assaults by patients," according to a January 2012 research brief by the National Council on Compensation Insurance, Inc., (NCCI), a data collection bureau that focuses on workers' compensation matters. NCCI found that 61 percent of all workplace assaults are committed by health care patients. Assaults by coworkers make up just 7 percent of assaults, and 23 percent of workplace assaults are by a person who is neither a health care patient nor a coworker. The rest of the assaults were unspecified.

An Associated Press article says the danger of assault is

higher for social workers, nurses, aides and other mental health providers than for other types of workers. According to that article, that these workers are four times as likely to be assaulted as others. Bureau of Labor Statistics data shows that 20 health care workers died on the job between 2005 and 2009.

Given these figures, are health care employers taking workplace violence seriously enough? Some workplace violence experts say that many facilities fail to provide a safe working environment. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has safety guidelines for health care workers, but the guidelines are voluntary and it's unclear how widely they were implemented.

- If you have been injured by violence at work, you may be eligible for workers' compensation. For more information, visit our page on workplace violence.