

Nurses Facing Increasing Violence On the Job

Nursing is a well-respected profession that many aspire to as a noble calling. Unfortunately, the profession has been hit by a wave of violence in which nurses have reportedly been the targets of violent assaults by patients.

In one recent incident, at Temple Hospital in Philadelphia, two nurses were assaulted by patients, one of whom pulled out a knife and threw it at a nurse. Another nurse tried to stop a patient from grabbing needles and stabbed herself with them when the patient grabbed her and threw her around the room.

The Health Services and Resource Administration reports that nurses and hospital workers in the health care sector have the highest rate of workplace violence of all sectors. And nurses bear the brunt of health care workplace violence as they are most frequently the targets of violence of all health care professions based on a study by the Department of Justice. ER nurses in particular tend to face assaults in the workplace. A 2009 study from the Emergency Nurse's Association indicated that more than one-half of all emergency nurses experienced violence on the job.

What is Causing the Uptick of Violence in Hospitals?

The upsurge in violence could be attributed to the lack of security staff on hand, but in the bad economy, emergency rooms are being filled by uninsured people, which creates longer waiting times and frustration that patients or their families take out on nurses and staff.

With state budget cutbacks in mental health treatment and facilities, mentally ill and drug-addicted patients have no

recourse other than crowded hospital or clinic emergency rooms, where they might have a violent episode.

Health workers should not have to accept that workplace violence is a part of their job, although they should always be vigilant and expect that they will come across violent patients at times. Workers injured on the job are eligible for workers' compensation benefits, and hospitals may want to consider implementing safety measures due to the high cost of compensation insurance and the costs of filling shifts for workers.

Some medical facilities are considering the use of metal detectors. Others are introducing measures to analyze conditions that may precipitate violence and by training staff in violence de-escalation. The use of rapid response teams to combat violent incidents is becoming more common, as well as having trained security staff present.

Maintaining records that would flag patients with a violent history and establishing a safety policy with well-defined procedures, and which encourages nurses to report violent incidents, would also offer them greater security and confidence on the job.

If you are a professional health care worker such as an ER nurse, nurse's assistant or other medical worker injured on the job, contact an experienced work comp lawyer to make sure that you obtain all the work comp benefits to which you are entitled.