

SECURITY

***ADDRESSING PATIENT
VIOLENCE IN HEALTHCARE
SETTINGS & HOSPITALS***



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The International Association of Healthcare Security and Safety (IAHSS) recently released [new guidance](#) on how to help healthcare officials address visitor and patient violence in hospitals. Patient violence – whether it is physical or verbal – not only threatens human life and the well-being of hospital staff but also threatens patient safety and creates an unhealthy work environment.

The [IAHSS guidelines](#) open with the statement that “Violence stemming from patients and patient visitors present considerable risk and concern to the healthcare industry. Healthcare Facilities (HCFs) should establish specific violence prevention and aggression management policies, processes and practices to deter, identify and manage violent events.” The guideline then touches on several important best practices and policies for hospitals to consider to proactively address violent and threatening patients and family members.

In light of this guidance from IAHSS, one of the main ways that healthcare organizations can respond to patient violence is to put a communications plan and platform in place to manage incidents. Below are three ways that healthcare facilities and hospitals can prepare for visitor and patient violence, and the overall strategies to follow.

Build a Crisis Management Team

One reason why responding quickly to patient violence is important is that patient care must be able to continue during and after an emergency, especially when potentially life-threatening conditions are being treated. Staff must be able to continue to do their jobs and maintain a calm, operational environment even in the face of an emergency to ensure patient safety.

Building a crisis management team is an important first step in laying the groundwork to respond to patient violence. Select top leadership in various hospital areas from administration to doctors and assign specific roles on the team. By establishing a core team of decision makers in advance, your organization will benefit from a clear set of roles and a chain of command if an incident occurs.

Establish a Communication Platform

The ability to communicate critical time-sensitive information when a stressful situation unfolds is crucial. In order to communicate quickly and have the ability to share key information with many different groups – from personnel to patients to family members and even local law enforcement – you must have a reliable, accurate platform that allows you to communicate in real-time with all relevant individuals or groups.

Emergency Mass Notification Systems (EMNS) play a key role in this regard, allowing authorized individuals to provide critical information and updates to patients and keep staff and doctors connected. The coordination and simplification offered by a comprehensive mass notification system enable healthcare workers and administrators to stay focused on patient care and other tasks.

After building your crisis management team, writing a formal emergency plan aimed at patient violence as well as other violent or concerning patient or staff situations is the next step. This can include pre-written actions that each department, team or individual should take. These can then be communicated through emergency mass notifications via email, automated phone message or text, based on individual preference and the urgency of the situation. Three specific ways that mass notification can support communication during an emergency include:

- **Crisis coordination:** Mass notification can provide a powerful way to coordinate efforts between different hospital teams during an emergency – to prepare teams, direct responders, and route any supplies that might be needed.
- **Security broadcasts:** Send an alert to all personnel, no matter where they are, in case of an unauthorized intruder to let everyone know to be cautious and report suspicious activity.
- **Emergency requests for additional staff:** When a mass emergency occurs, use notifications to increase staff support.

Train Your Team

Whether it is a small local practice or one of the largest medical enterprises in the world, it is critical for healthcare organizations of all sizes to have a plan in place. Work through mock patient violence exercises, so that staff can build confidence by practicing specific steps to take in reaction to an emergency. Familiarize your staff with any technology platforms or emergency mass notifications systems to ensure that when an incident occurs, hospital personnel are prepared and know their specific role in mitigating risk.

Patient violence in hospitals is something that no team ever wants to experience, but it's extremely important for healthcare centers and hospitals to be ready if and when it does happen. Building a crisis management team, an emergency action plan, training in advance, and lining up communication strategies can help your staff and the entire organization navigate patient violence incidents as safely and effectively as possible.

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