

NATIONAL EMERGENCY NURSES ASSOCIATION



Position Statement	Violence in the Emergency Department
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Issue

Violence is a serious occupational risk for Emergency Department staff. It includes physical attack, verbal abuse, and/or threatening or coercive behaviour. Although the Emergency Department (ED) can be an unpredictable environment that may leave staff, patients, and visitors at high risk for violence, a significant amount of ED violence is preventable.

Horizontal violence is defined as an act of aggression perpetrated by one colleague towards another colleague. Horizontal violence may be verbal, non-verbal, or physical; it may also be seen as inappropriate or unprofessional behaviour.

NENA Position

NENA believes that a zero tolerance for violence or the threat of violence must be in place in all health care settings.

NENA believes some violent behaviour may be prevented and supports the joint Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) and Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU) Position Statement on Workplace Violence (revised in 2008).

NENA believes that violence toward nurses is extensive and that the perpetrators are usually patients or families, but it can also include horizontal violence.

NENA believes all agencies must provide adequate staffing, security equipment, personnel, policies, guidelines, and training programs to ensure safety from violence.

NENA believes a safe working environment assures personal security, improves staff morale, patient care, and productivity.

NENA believes that employers should provide professional debriefing for employees exposed to workplace violence with the option of obtaining further counseling.

NENA recommends that Emergency Nurses be given opportunities to develop skills to prevent, de-escalate, and intervene when necessary in violent or potentially violent situations.

NENA further believes that along with their employers, Emergency Nurses can be proactive in the development of policies and other initiatives to ensure safety.

NENA acknowledges that violent incidents are under reported and recommends that Emergency Nurses report all violent episodes in order to assist employers in the development of effective policies and procedures to ensure safety.

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NENA believes that criminal prosecution should be pursued against those individuals who commit violent acts in the ED, when deemed appropriate, based on the circumstances of the incident.

Rationale

The emergency department must provide a safe, secure environment for staff, patients and visitors. This safe environment has the potential to improve patient care, nursing morale and productivity. Research has demonstrated that EDs in hospitals with a higher commitment to safety and reporting policies have lower rates of physical violence and verbal abuse. Employers, Emergency Nurses, and other members of the health care team must work together to ensure that ED violence is minimized.

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