



It's not part of the job

UNISON Branch Guide on Tackling Violence in the NHS

January 2021

Introduction

This guide has been produced for branches and health and safety reps and should be read alongside the new [NHS Violence Prevention Reduction Standard](#). Although the standard is for the NHS in England, the principles and advice may be applicable to branches in devolved administrations.

Reducing violence in the NHS

Violence in the NHS shows little signs of lessening. Each year, across the NHS around 14% - 15% of staff report through the NHS Staff Survey that they have experienced physical violence & aggression from patients, relatives or public in the last 12 months. That is around 75,000 staff in England every year! The rates are worse for certain occupational groups and services, for example ambulance (33%) and mental health and learning disability trusts (20%). This is replicated in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland – although the reporting of violence varies by devolved administration.

UNISON believes that violence and aggression are not part of the job! Make this clear on your branch social media platform with the graphics from our website www.unison.org.uk/NoNHSViolence

Impact of violence

No matter where people work violence and aggression are real issues, which come in many forms including physical and verbal assaults. Incidents leave people with physical and psychological injuries, leading to time off, isolation from the workplace, loss of confidence, people quitting their jobs, PTSD and other significant long-term psychiatric conditions.

NHS Violence Reduction Standards

A new Violence Prevention and Reduction Standard, agreed through the NHS Social Partnership Forum (England), aims to deliver a risk-based framework that supports NHS staff to work in safe and secure environments, safeguarding against abuse, aggression and violence.

This supports a promise from the [NHS People Plan](#), launched in July 2020, for leaders to prevent and control violence so that “*staff should never be fearful or apprehensive about coming to work*”.

The Violence Prevention and Reduction Standard provides an agreed framework under which UNISON Branches and UNISON Health and Safety reps have a role in partnership in making workplaces safer for staff and patients.

What can branches do?

We have developed a [new poster](#) and updated our [website](#) so branches can talk to members about violence and aggression. Get printed copies from <https://shop.unison.site/product/its-not-part-of-the-job-poster/> and put one in every workplace.

The Violence Prevention and Reduction Standard uses the *Plan Do Check Act* approach. At every stage, the standard references the requirements for either engagement or consultation with trade unions. For example,

- being involved in the development of the **Violence Prevention and Reduction Strategy, Policy and Objectives** through the health and safety committee
- regular discussions with the organisation's Violence Reduction and Prevention Lead
- involvement in the development of a training needs analysis
- development and audit of local risk assessments
- joint communications with staff about violence prevention and reduction plans
- reviews of incidents to ensure learning
- involvement in the twice-yearly senior management review

Branch committees should discuss their priorities for reduction and prevention of violence. The following are ideas to focus on:

1. Making the workplace as safe as possible (before)

Branches should be involved in making sure workplaces are as safe as possible – before violence or aggression are present. As part of this assessment consider:

- Numbers of trained health and safety reps
- Are there known issues with staffing levels or work environments?
- What measures are needed for community and ambulance staff working environments?
- Are workplace violence risk assessments in place? If not, ask the employer to complete one and get involved
- Are staff and managers trained on violence, including procedures for staff in the event of an incident?
- Working in partnership with the employer to set out strong cultural position on violence

2. Checking the response to violence and aggression (during)

It is important that everyone knows the procedures to follow in the event of an incident of violence or aggression. These should be clear and based on the workplace risk assessment to ensure a consistent response. Consider the following:

- Ensure roles are clear within each department and workplace
- At what point will Trust security or the police be called to an incident?
- Is the workplace covered by CCTV?
- Have incidents happened before, how well did the plans work in operation and what was learned to improve responses?

3. Support for staff following an incident (after)

Making sure people are fully supported if they are involved in an incident will help reduce the psychological impact and support them back to work. It is important that:

- The report is taken seriously
- The investigation is thorough and lessons are learned to prevent it happening again
- High quality physical and mental support is offered to staff through the employer
- Where appropriate, prosecution of perpetrators is encouraged using the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018¹

Legislation

The five relevant parts of health and safety legislation that extends to violence at work are:

- [Health and Safety at Work Act 1974](#) (HASAWA)
- [Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999](#)
- [Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013](#) (RIDDOR)
- [Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977](#)
- [Health and Safety \(Consultation with Employees\) Regulations 1996](#)

Other resources

UNISON's violence campaign speaks to members about the issue and impact of violence and aggression in the workplace. It works alongside and compliments other campaigns such as [End Violence at Work Charter](#) and [It's not part of the job](#).

What can members do?

If they are interested in safety, they could become a [UNISON Health and Safety Rep](#). There is training and paid time off to take on this role.

UNISON's campaign on violence

UNISON will continue to campaign on violence. This means:

- Getting accurate data on the levels of violence NHS staff face, to show national, regional and local trends – so that we can promote areas of good practice and improve areas of poor practice
- Ensuring managers are trained and understand their responsibilities to work in partnership with health and safety reps to do risk assessments and put in place the right protections for staff
- Ensuring staff are trained and supported to deal with challenging situations – including de-escalation and restraint (anyone expected to undertake this as part of their role must receive adequate training to do this safely for themselves and for patients)
- Ensuring staff get quality physical and psychological support if they are assaulted at work.
- Ensuring the courts to use the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018 to prosecute offenders who assault staff.

¹ The definition of an emergency worker in the 2018 Act goes beyond specific titles and jobs, and extends to persons whose role brings them within the definition: "A person employed for the purposes of providing, or engaged to provide NHS health services" or "A person employed for the purposes of providing, or engaged to provide services in the support of the provision of NHS health services". For more details visit: <https://www.cps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publications/Joint%20Agreement%20on%20Offences%20against%20Emergency%20Workers.pdf>

Further resources

NHS Violence Prevention Reduction Standard

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/violence-prevention-and-reduction-standard/>

UNISON Health Group pages

<https://www.unison.org.uk/NoNHsviolence>

The NHS Social Partnership Forum

<https://www.socialpartnershipforum.org/priority-areas/the-violence-reduction-%E2%80%93-creating-a-culture-of-safety-sub-group/>

UNISON Health and Safety

<https://www.unison.org.uk/unison-health-and-safety/>

Become a health and safety rep

<https://www.unison.org.uk/unison-health-and-safety/become-safety-rep/>

It's not part of the job guide

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2013/07/On-line-Catalogue216963.pdf>

End violence at work guide

<https://www.unison.org.uk/at-work/community/key-issues/end-violence-work/end-violence-work-charter/>

Violence at work: it's not part of the job – member's guide

https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/04/24894_Violence_at_work.pdf

NHS Staff Council – Health safety and wellbeing partnership group

<https://www.nhsemployers.org/engagement-and-networks/nhs-staff-council/health-safety-and-wellbeing-partnership-group>

Joint agreement on offences against emergency works

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publications/Joint%20Agreement%20on%20Offences%20against%20Emergency%20Workers.pdf>