

Assessing Environmental Factors to Reduce Violence in Hospitals

Healthcare and social service workers experience the highest rates of injuries caused by workplace violence and are five times as likely to be injured because of workplace violence than workers overall, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.¹ Violence can occur in all areas of a hospital, but it happens most frequently in behavioral health units, emergency departments, waiting rooms, and geriatric units.² The risk factors for workplace violence vary from facility to facility.

Since no universal strategy exists to address these risk factors and prevent violence, hospital leaders can protect their patients, employees, and visitors by developing comprehensive violence prevention programs, evaluating those programs regularly, and providing safety training programs for employees.

Part of a prevention program includes assessing and addressing any issues in the environmental designs in a hospital. This checklist can be used to assess environmental factors in a hospital and determine whether any deficiencies exist that can be modified to enhance the safety for all patients, employees, and visitors.

	Yes	No
Security Measures		
Are emergency signaling systems used (e.g., portable or fixed panic buttons, paging systems at workstations, or personal alarm devices worn by employees)? Are they tested on a regular basis and repaired promptly when necessary?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are video surveillance systems (e.g., security cameras or closed-circuit monitors) present inside and outside of the building(s)? Are they tested on a regular basis and repaired promptly when necessary?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there security mirrors (e.g., convex/curved mirrors) in the building(s) for better surveillance? Are they present in dead-end corridors and cross corridors?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
Security Measures (continued)		
Are there security screening devices (e.g., metal detectors) in the building(s)? Are they regularly maintained?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do doors and walls have acrylic panels for better monitoring?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do buildings have secured entry (e.g., cameras and buzzers)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do all visitors and contractors sign in and wear visible identification?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assuming all employees are required to wear identification (either badges or cards): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has it been considered to use only employees' first names, especially for employees working in behavioral health units? • If employees wear identification badges attached to a chain or cord around their necks, has it been considered to replace them with "tear-away" badges? (If a badge is grabbed and wrapped around an employee's neck, it may pose a risk of harm and/or injury.) 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Do all doors in the building(s) have locks?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are all organization phones, including the internal telephone system, programmed for 911 and/or local emergency security numbers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do employees have easy access to telephones?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are two-way radios available? Are they tested on a daily basis?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are all broken windows and doors in the building(s) repaired promptly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do exterior hospital windows only open 4 to 6 inches to prevent access or elopement?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exterior Building Areas		
In states in which guns are not allowed to be carried, are signs installed on the facility campus that contain verbiage indicating no guns or weapons are permitted?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are entrances to the building(s) clearly visible from the street?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
Exterior Building Areas (continued)		
Is the area surrounding the building(s) free of bushes and other hiding places?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the lighting bright and effective in outdoor areas (e.g., entrances, sidewalks, courtyards, parking lots)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are exterior walkways visible to security personnel?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are security personnel stationed outside the building(s)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
For hospitals that have a secured/attended parking lot for employees:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the parking lot area free of blind spots? 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the landscaping trimmed back to prevent hiding within? 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the lighting adequate to see clearly in the parking lot and when walking to the building(s)? 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do security personnel escort employees to and from the parking lot when it's dark or when requested by employees? 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Entries/Exits		
Do buildings have sufficient exits and adequate escape routes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do all exit doors only open from the inside to prevent unauthorized entry?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are security guards present at the main entrances and exits?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is a security device (e.g., metal detector) placed at the building(s) entrances?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are reception and work areas designed to prevent unauthorized entry?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are security devices, such as cameras, located in the hallways?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a "safe room" for employees to go to in case of an emergency?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is furniture arranged so that employees can have a clear exit route?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Regarding behavioral health units:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there a place to lock visitors' valuables before entering the unit? 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are all visitors to the unit checked for contraband before entering? 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
Entries/Exits (continued)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do counseling rooms have two exits? 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do staff counseling and treatment rooms have doors with locks? 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are windows locked to prevent access or elopement? 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Barrier Protection		
Is the reception desk enclosed and does it have bullet-resistant glass?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are counters designed (deep and elevated) to prevent patients from jumping over or reaching over to unlock the gate into any nurses' stations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are all unused doors locked to limit access in accordance with local fire codes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Regarding areas in which cash is exchanged: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are physical barriers (e.g., acrylic glass partitions and bullet-resistant customer windows) erected where cash is exchanged? Are there drop safes to limit the amount of cash? 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Waiting and Work Area Hazards		
Are waiting areas designed to accommodate and assist visitors and patients who may have a delay in service (e.g., comfortable chairs and furniture of differing sizes upholstered with combination and engineered fabrics or vinyl and of a calming color, soft lighting used instead of fluorescent lighting, flat screen TVs, neatly arranged reading material, and outlets for charging phones)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are hallways and work areas clear of obstacles that may block pathways?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are chairs and furniture in waiting and work areas secured to prevent them from being used as weapons?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is furniture arranged in waiting and work areas to prevent employees from being trapped?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lighting		
Regarding interior areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is bright, effective (not harsh) lighting installed inside the building(s)? Are burned out lights reported and replaced immediately? 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
Lighting (continued)		
Regarding exterior areas:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is bright, effective lighting installed at the entrances, on the grounds, near the sidewalks, in the courtyards, in the parking areas, and on the walkways? 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are landscaping materials cut back from lights and light standards so as not to affect their coverage? 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are exterior lights numbered to help identify broken ones? 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Patient Areas		
Are open hinges on doors replaced with continuous hinges to reduce pinching hazards?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do cabinets and syringe drawers have working locks installed on them?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are sharp-edged objects, such as metal table frames, padded or replaced?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are sharp surfaces covered or smoothed down?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are handrails, drinking fountains, and any other protruding items recessed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can employees observe patients in waiting areas and rooms from workstations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is appropriate lighting used in patient areas?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has an area been established for patients to de-escalate? Does this room have camera observation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employee-Only Areas		
Is there a designated employee-only work area separate from the public area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do employees have a designated secure place to store their personal belongings?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there lockable (for keyless door systems) and secure restrooms for employees (with locks on the inside) that are separated from patient and visitor facilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
<i>Travel Vehicles</i>		
Are the hospital's travel vehicles properly maintained?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has it been considered to add physical barriers in the vehicles between the driver and forensic patients where appropriate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Resources

- [American Hospital Association: Workforce and Workplace Violence Prevention](#)
- [American Society for Healthcare Risk Management: Workplace Violence Toolkit](#)
- [ASIS International: Healthcare Security Community](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Violence Occupational Hazards in Hospitals](#)
- [International Association for Healthcare Security & Safety \(IAHSS\): Guidelines](#)
- [MedPro Group: From Verbal Insults to Death: The Reality of Workplace Violence in Healthcare](#)
- [MedPro Group: Risk Q&A: Concealed Carry in Healthcare Facilities](#)
- [MedPro Group: Risk Resources: Emergency Preparedness and Response](#)
- [MedPro Group: Risk Resource: Violence Prevention in the Emergency Department](#)
- [MedPro Group: Tips and Strategies for De-Escalating Aggressive, Hostile, or Violent Patients](#)
- [Public Services Health & Safety Association: Workplace Violence Risk Assessment Toolkit for Acute Care](#)

Endnotes

- ¹ Gooch, K. (2021, October 11). Healthcare workers push to address workplace violence. *Becker's Hospital Review*. Retrieved from www.beckershospitalreview.com/workforce/healthcare-workers-push-to-address-workplace-violence.html
- ² National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. (2002). Violence occupational hazards in hospitals. Retrieved from www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2002-101/

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