
HEALTH SERVICE EXECUTIVE
POSITION PAPER ON THE MANAGEMENT OF WORK RELATED AGGRESSION AND VIOLENCE
ISSUED IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE PUBLICATION OF
'LINKING SERVICE AND SAFETY: TOGETHER CREATING SAFER PLACES OF SERVICE'

BACKGROUND

Work-related aggression and violence is a serious problem within healthcare which diminishes the quality of working life for staff, compromises organizational effectiveness and impacts negatively on the provision of services. The Health Service Executive has developed a comprehensive suite of corporate responses to the issue of conflicts within the workplace. Interpersonal conflict among staff is addressed in the Dignity at Work policy and conflict between staff and service users is addressed in the Trust in Care policy. The Linking Service and Safety report now completes this suite by addressing aggression toward staff by service users, and as this work proceeds this statement should guide efforts in managing aggression and violence.

POSITION STATEMENT

It is the position of the Health Service Executive that aggression and violence towards its staff is unacceptable. It is important that all staff appreciate that such behaviours should not be considered as inherent, inevitable or acceptable. Ensuring the safety of personnel and patients is a priority concern for the HSE which is committed to creating safe environments in which to work or to be treated. This complex task requires an integrated organizational response which adequately and equitably addresses the obligations owed to all concerned.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all personnel, including permanent, temporary and agency staff, contractors, volunteers, students and those on work experience. It should support and be congruent with local and service specific guidance for managing work related aggression and violence.

DEFINITION OF VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION DEFINITIONS

The Health Service Executive has adopted the EU definition of work related aggression and violence as:

'any incident in which a member of staff or person working in Health Service Executive is verbally abused, threatened or physically assaulted by a patient or member of the public in circumstances relating to his or her employment'.

Work related aggression and violence within the healthcare context is a complex phenomena which has neither quick fix or simple solutions. Consequently occurrences need to be understood as being embedded within the broader context of service provision and involve a broad range of contributory factors and influences. These factors can functionally be considered as involving a process of complex interactions between:

- Service users and others,
- Service providers (personnel)
- The interaction taking place
- The physical and service environment in which the interaction takes place

POLICY AIMS

The purpose of this statement is to guide ongoing efforts in the context of the continuing work which will formulate a comprehensive corporate policy on the management of work related aggression and violence. This interim policy is intended to:

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- increase staff awareness of work related aggression and violence;
 - ensure that risks associated with work related aggression and violence are methodically assessed in a systematic and continuous way
 - ensure that safe systems and practices of work are in place to minimize associated risks as far as is reasonably practicable;
 - ensure that staff are provided with appropriate training which provides practical advice on how to prevent, recognize, and manage work related aggression and violence
 - ensure that appropriate supports are available to staff who may encounter occurrences of work related aggression and violence
 - ensure that recording and reporting mechanisms are understood and that the importance of reporting occurrences of work related violence and aggression is appreciated.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The **Chief Executive Officer** has overall responsibility for:

- ensuring that arrangements exist for identifying, evaluating and managing risks associated with work related aggression and violence.
- providing resources necessary for implementing policy
- ensuring that governance arrangements are in place in order that organizational, professional, and legislative obligations in relation to the management of work related aggression and violence are being addressed.

Senior and Line managers are responsible for:

- ensuring that all staff are aware of the policy;
- ensuring that regularly reviewed risk assessments are conducted and reflected in safety statements;
- putting procedures and safe systems of work into practice which minimize associated risks as far as is reasonably practicable;
- making sure that personnel identified as being at risk are given appropriate education, instruction and practical advice on how to prevent, recognize, and manage work related aggression and violence
- ensuring that appropriate supports are available to staff who may encounter occurrences of work related aggression and violence
- ensure that recording and reporting mechanisms are understood and that the importance of reporting occurrences of work related violence and aggression is appreciated.
- monitoring the effectiveness of preventative measures and ensuring that remedial measures identified through occurrence review are implemented.

All **staff** are responsible for:

- taking due care of their own safety, health and welfare and that of others
- adhering to procedures designed for safe working
- utilising preventive measures and strategies provided to minimise factors which might compromise their safety e.g. mobile phones, alarms.
- undertaking relevant education and training provided
- reporting dangers or concerns identified and occurrences of work related aggression and violence;

ASSESSING RISK

Risks associated with work related aggression and violence must be methodically assessed in all settings in which there is a potential for such occurrences. Assessments will be conducted by competent individuals and should consider potential contributory factors including service users; service providers; interactions occurring; and environmental variables as relevant to the particular setting. It is essential in instances where work related aggression and/or violence are identified as foreseeable, that the safety statement explicitly outlines the control measures required and identifies those responsible for their implementation, communication to personnel, and their ongoing audit/review.

MANAGING OCCURRENCES

Safety statements based upon risk assessments will provide practical guidance to staff on managing occurrences of work related aggression and/or violence including details of emergency procedures. All staff must be familiar with local procedures for raising the alarm and securing assistance in the event that their safety, or that of others under their care, is compromised.

STAFF TRAINING

All personnel must be provided with education and training in the work related aggression and violence, which is appropriate to their professional and organisational responsibilities. The assessment, design and content of training provided should be based upon a service specific risk assessment and should be fully compliant with the organisational, professional and legislative structures within which services are provided. A strong preventive emphasis will underpin all education and training which should focus on providing practical guidance on recognising, assessing and managing occurrences. Training will also reinforce guidance on occurrence recording, post occurrence review; and post occurrence support needs of those involved.

USE OF PHYSICAL INTERVENTIONS

The use of physical interventions is a complex issue, which should be considered as a last resort option in all instances. However it is acknowledged that on occasion such interventions are the only or most appropriate option. In such situations it is critical that staff are competent in the employment of safe effective techniques in order to preserve the safety of all concerned. The HSE is committed to the use of such interventions being governed by standards of best practice. Priority is assigned to establishing the safety and fitness for purpose of physical interventions currently in use in the first instance.

SUPPORT FOR STAFF

Staff who are exposed to various manifestations of aggression and violence will be provided with sensitive and practical support to assist them cope with the occurrence. While most staff will require only minimal post-occurrence support, others may require a wider range of support measures. Consequently an integrated multi-layered repertoire of best practice support measures should be readily available to staff together with information as to how services may be accessed. The role of the line managers is pivotal in providing support, and it is important that they are prepared for and supported in this role.

ORGANISATIONAL SECURITY RESPONSES

Responding to perpetrators of aggression and violence within the healthcare context is complex as occurrences often take place within a professional service relationship. Decisions taken in the aftermath of such occurrences must balance the obligations to provide services with the duty of care owed to staff. Notwithstanding this debate there is a need to protect the welfare of staff and others and the property of the organization. Subsequently in circumstances in which a risk is posed to the safety of staff or others the organization is obligated to institute measures which ensures the safety of all concerned. The HSE is committed to developing a structure to guide and support decision making in such circumstances. Priority is assigned to providing services with a structured system of legal advice in the first instance.

IMPLEMENTATION

The proposed framework comprising of the Project Joint Governance Committee, reflecting the partnership ethos, along with the Central Project Office, and the Multi Agency Advisory Forum will be established forthwith. These structures will be charged with the responsibility to ensure that the recommendations of the report are implemented in the shortest possible timeframe consistent with the expectations set out in the report.

REVIEW

This position will be reviewed within twelve months of issue to reflect developments accomplished in line with the recommendations of the Linking Service and Safety strategy.