



College of Emergency
Nurses New Zealand
Ngā Ringa Ringa Aroha NZNO



College of Emergency Nursing New Zealand (CENNZ^{NZNO}) Position Statement for Violence and Aggression in the Emergency Department

Purpose

The College of Emergency Nurses New Zealand (CENNZ), believes that the emergency nurses of Aotearoa New Zealand have the right to be treated with respect and work in a safe and healthy workplace, free from all forms of violence.

Definitions

The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2002, p. 5) defines violence as “*the intentional use of physical force of power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation*”.

Background

There is clear and consistent evidence that the Emergency Departments (ED) of Aotearoa New Zealand are environments in which there is a high risk for violence and aggression (Irvine et al., 2023; Gale et al., 2014). The 2019 New Zealand Nurses Organisation (NZNO) Employment Survey demonstrated reports of violence and aggression to be higher in the ED than any other setting (NZNO, 2020). All patients, whānau, and staff in the ED have the right to a safe environment. Employers are required to provide a safe working environment as described by the Health and Safety at Work Act (WorkSafe NZ, 2020). The underlying culture of acceptance around workplace violence in emergency care is a barrier to reducing and preventing incidents of violence and aggression in ED.

The following position has been updated with the New Zealand Government’s Mahi Haumarū Aotearoa Workplace Safety Guidance for Persons Conducting a Business or Undertaking (PCBU) in the Health and Disability Support Sector and the Health and Safety at Work Act (2015) in mind.

Key Recommendations

It is the position of the College of Emergency Nurses New Zealand that:

- A nationally consistent approach of “zero tolerance to violence” in the ED is required; this is to be upheld by all nurses, staff and management within health organisations, including Te Whatu Ora.
- Every department/unit must have policies and procedures regarding the management and reporting of acts of all forms of violence, including threats of violence.
- Every department/unit must display clear signage throughout the department, including waiting room and triage areas advocating the “zero tolerance to violence” stance.
- Every emergency nurse has the right to a confidential process, as well as access to appropriate injury care, debriefing, professional counselling and professional supervision.
- Every emergency nurse should have access to education and training related to the prevention, recognition, management and mitigation of violence. This education should include breakaway training.

- Every department/unit should have 24/7 security guards present and active. CENNZ highlights that security guards in the ED require education and training specific to the needs of the ED.
- Every ED staff member should have access and training in duress alarm and/or other escalation tool management. Such tools are to be supplied and maintained by the employer.
- The regulations within the Health and Safety Work Act (2013) need to be updated to ensure that WorkSafe is notified of all emergency nurses and other staff experiences of violence. CENNZ is of the position that any healthcare assessment and/or treatment required by a staff member as a result of violence must be notified to WorkSafe. This health assessment and/or treatment may include, but are not limited to, Primary Care, EDs and Mental Health services such as counselling.
- Reporting
 - Means of reporting acts of violence should be readily accessible to all staff, encouraged, and easy to use.
 - Each report of violence and aggression needs to be followed up with on an individual basis and meaningful support offered.
 - In the instance where a nurse or other staff member experiences violence, EDs and their organisation should support them in taking legal action.
 - Reports of violence should be audited regularly to identify areas of concern so timely and appropriate action can be undertaken to address risk and enhance safety.
 - On-going national monitoring of violence in ED, research on how it can be addressed and interventions funded and implemented.
 - The reporting of violence and aggression needs to be assessed with an equity lens.
- An on-going, Governmental and public commitment to alcohol and drug reduction is required.
- Public education around violence in the ED setting is maintained.
- EDs and their organisations need to reflect and act on preventative measures, such as the provision of education, to ensure safe and effective communication in their customer service with patients' and whānau.
- CENNZ is of the position that a government commitment to resourcing efforts to improve time to assessment, treatment and disposition for patients presenting to EDs as a result of mental distress must be prioritised.

References

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