



Violence Against Hospital Staff: A Crisis in Care and How Technology Can Help

I spent 10 years as a critical care RN. I didn't leave bedside nursing because I lacked passion, skill, or dedication—loved my job. But everything changed the day a patient assaulted me, fracturing my orbital bone. That violent incident made me rethink my future in direct patient care. Decades later, what was once seen as a rare event has become a daily risk—and for many healthcare workers, a painful turning point.

A Growing Crisis

Workplace Violence (WPV) against hospital staff is escalating into a global healthcare crisis. Nurses, physicians, technicians, and support staff are increasingly subjected to verbal threats, physical assaults, and emotional abuse. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, healthcare workers are five times more likely to experience workplace violence than workers in all other industries. The American Hospital Association (2023) reported that 44% of nurses experienced physical violence and 68% faced verbal abuse during the pandemic alone. Even more shocking, while healthcare professionals make up only 10% of the US workforce, they experience a staggering 48% of recorded nonfatal injuries due to WFV.

The trend not only endangers frontline staff—it degrades the quality of care, accelerates clinician burnout, drives staff turnover, and inflates healthcare costs. The National Institute for the Prevention of Workplace Violence estimates that a single serious incident—factoring in medical treatment, legal fees, lost productivity, and turnover can cost \$250,000 or more (AllOne Health, 2019). The causes of hospital violence are complex and deeply rooted in systemic challenges. High-stress environments, long patient wait times, mental health issues, substance use, and chronic understaffing all contribute to rising tensions.

Technology as a Workplace Violence Safety Net

While technology alone is not the answer to WPV, it can provide an important means to mitigate and minimize violence against staff. Nurse call systems, which are already required by code in almost all staff and patient areas within a hospital, are often overlooked for the staff safety tools the systems provide. The latest generation of systems offer layered, real-time communication between patients and care teams. What staff historically refer to as a simple “call bell” has now transformed into a powerful safety hub- enabling staff-to-staff and patient-to-staff communication, wireless device integration, multiple alert modes, and rapid escalation pathways. These tools are not just patient lifelines; they serve as the backbone for staff safety systems by providing streamlined communication to and from each patient room.

For example, Provider Nurse Call System manufactured by Jeron Electronic Systems, Inc. supports multiple modes of alerting to both patient and staff alerts which includes hallway indicators, nurse consoles and graphic displays in key staff areas, and wireless alerts to mobile caregivers. These multiple alerting modes greatly improve response time to patient requests for help, equipment alarms, emergency situations and de-escalation before WPV occurs. Nurse call systems supports real-time situational awareness with passive audible monitoring of a room from the nurse console to improve the safety for a nurse in a high-risk patient room. In addition, when staff are in a patient room, low priority alerts can automatically be upgraded to Staff Emergency alerts because it is most likely a staff member that is placing the call.



When Provider by Jeron incorporates RTLS (Real Time Locating System), the wireless tags worn by staff include a staff duress button. This button allows staff to instantly alert other staff in the area or the security team to a situation before it escalates into WPV. Hospitals using these types of wireless technologies have reported up to a 60% decrease in violent incidents due to their deterrent effect (Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania, 2022).

Upcoming Technology to Address WPV

The latest technology implemented in hospitals include smart video and smart phones that can leverage the multiple alerting modes available through nurse call systems similar to Provider. For example, integrated smart cameras can detect aggressive body language, elevated voices, or crowding which in turn triggers nurse call alerts to notify surrounding staff and security teams. Smart phones carried by mobile staff operate as extensions of the system and can utilize nurse call's multiple alerting modes to notify nearby staff or the security team of potential WPV.

Training and Cultural Change

Technology is only part of the solution. Staff education must evolve too. Virtual reality (VR) training allows clinicians to rehearse de-escalation strategies in a safe, simulated environment. Just-in-time e-learning modules can reinforce recognition of early warning signs and effective use of communication tools. Importantly, every staff member, not just nurses—must be educated on how to use the in-room communication system. It should be a core component of workforce safety protocols and response plans.

A Layered Approach: Moral and Financial Imperative

No single technology can eliminate workplace violence, but a layered strategy—combining smart nurse call systems, predictive analytics, and proactive design—offers the best defense. With individual incidents costs of \$250,000 and up, prevention must be viewed as both a moral obligation and a strategic investment.

Hospital leaders must commit to a culture shift—one that places staff safety at the heart of patient care. By leveraging technology with intention and urgency, we can create safer, more resilient environments where healthcare teams and patients thrive together.

Author

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