

Position Statement on Workplace Violence, Incivility, and Bullying in Ambulatory Care



Authors: Dawn Fletcher, DNP, RN, NEA-BC, Beth Sparks, RN, MSN, NE-BC, Kelsey Loehr, BSN, RN; Sean Austin, MSN, RN, CEN, EMT, Michelle Fernamberg, DNP, MHA, RN, Jennifer McMullen, MS, RN, AGCNS-BC, CV-BC, AMB-BC, John C. Murphy, DNP, RN, Leslie Pihlstrom, RN, Catima Potter, MPH

**Approved by the AAACN Board of Directors:
August 14, 2023**

Ambulatory care nurses will not tolerate violence from any source. Internal and external violence events increase days missed from work, increase turnover, decrease retention, and impact patient outcomes (ANA, 2015). Ambulatory care nurses care for patients across diverse settings, creating complexity in managing challenging interactions and employing workplace violence prevention tactics.

Needs vary by location, patient population, size of practice and organization, hours of operation, physical layout of the work environment, and safety and security resources. Further, workplace violence manifests in various ways, such as in-person, over the telephone, through email, patient messages, virtual care, and social media. According to the Joint Commission (2021), it can include threats, physical harm, verbal abuse, sexual harassment, bullying, assaults, or other concerning behaviors involving staff, providers, patients, or visitors.

Nurses play a critical role in acknowledging and evaluating all acts of violence to determine an appropriate response based on the individual's physical or mental health needs. As such, nurses need ongoing training and education to recognize behaviors associated with patient and visitor violence and internal workplace violence from colleagues or resulting from the organizational hierarchy.

Nurses must advocate for policies and procedures to address the issue of workplace violence and incivility, as well as innovate solutions to promote healthy work environments (AAACN, 2023).

AAACN supports ambulatory nurses working in physically and psychologically safe healthcare settings, which promotes well-being, safety, and satisfaction (AAACN, 2023). AAACN recognizes that workplace violence, incivility, and bullying decrease patient quality of care and safety. Nurses must demand safe and secure care environments for themselves and their patients, striving for zero tolerance. AAACN supports ambulatory nurses as advocates in implementing policies and practices that improve nurse and patient safety. Tools and interdisciplinary resources should be made available to nurses in all care settings to promote safety. AAACN is committed to creating workplaces that are free from workplace violence, incivility, bullying, discrimination, and harassment to end workplace abuse and promote healthy work environments (AAACN, 2023).

AAACN endorses ambulatory care nurses' commitment to:

Prevention

- Designing safer workplaces and developing processes that contribute to a culture of safety to decrease violence, incivility, and bullying.
- Recognizing that healthcare workers have a right to be treated with dignity and respect while being professional and respectful of individuals in all encounters.

- Supporting the education and training for ambulatory nurses to gain the skills to engage, deflect, and help prevent workplace violence from escalating.
- Performing workplace safety assessments on a regular cadence and organizing routing practice events or drills.
- Using available resources to alert and prepare other team members for individuals displaying violent or disruptive behaviors or those with a history of such behaviors.

During Event

- Utilizing tools to help mitigate an individual's escalating behaviors while maintaining ethically sound judgment to protect their privacy and confidentiality.
- Empowering staff to disengage from the patient or situation.
- Proactively intervening during escalating or disruptive situations involving patients, families, or visitors.

After Event

- Reporting all acts of workplace violence, regardless of perpetrator, to area leader(s) and the organizational/facility leadership using event reporting and notifying security or local law enforcement when applicable.
- Creating and maintaining transparency by sharing experiences with other care team members for closed-loop communication and fostering learning.

- Recognizing the impact of workplace violence on the physical and psychological safety of the patient, family/visitor, and staff.
- Performing a structured post-event huddle and facilitated debriefing.

Influence

- Advocating for cultural change toward creating safer workplaces through legislation, regulatory reporting, and collaborating with professional organizations to create innovative approaches to addressing workplace violence.
- Promoting nursing research, education, and training to improve safety in the workplace and sharing evidence-based practices that create safety awareness for patients and staff.
- Holding all coworkers responsible for safe and fair treatment, regardless of title, to assist in building mutually respectful environments.

References

- American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nursing [AAACN]. (2023). *Scope and standards of practice for professional ambulatory care nursing (10th edition)*. AAACN.
- American Nurses Association. (2019). *Workplace violence in nursing: Dangerous and underreported*. <https://www.nursingworld.org/practice-policy/work-environment/end-nurse-abuse/workplace-violence/>
- American Nurses Association. (2015). *American Nurses Association position statement on incivility, bullying, and workplace violence*. ANA.
- The Joint Commission [TJC]. (2023). *Information on Joint Commission standards*. <https://www.jointcommission.org/resources/patient-safety-topics/workplace-violence-prevention>

The American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nursing (AAACN) is the only association for practicing nurses and nursing leaders specialized in serving people in community and hospital-based outpatient care settings. AAACN supports RNs by providing programs that advance holistic and evidence-based patient care and by advocating for their essential role in the future of health care.



AAACN Headquarters
 East Holly Ave Box 56
 Pitman, NJ 08071
 800-262-6877
 aaacn@aaacn.org
 aaacn.org