Workplace Violence Reduction: Screening and Early Intervention for Patients at Risk for Potential Violence

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Background: In 2021, The Joint Commission (TJC) introduced new standards aimed at guiding healthcare organizations in the identification and mitigation of workplace violence. This initiative prompted several states, including Arizona, to enact legislation requiring healthcare institutions to implement measures addressing the escalating incidents of violence against healthcare workers. Notably, Mayo Clinic Arizona had observed a similar trend of increasing violence, as evidenced by all-staff surveys conducted in 2020 and 2022, which revealed that over half of the respondents felt unsafe in their work environment. In response to the directives from TJC and the Arizona state legislation, as well as concerns highlighted by staff in the surveys, Mayo Clinic Arizona initiated its Workplace Violence Prevention (WPV) program in January 2021. The program's inception involved the formation of a multidisciplinary team, including psychiatry physicians, nurses, social workers, and hospital security staff. This team embarked on developing the Operation Reduce Occupational Violence Rates (ROVR) initiative, aimed at implementing strategic interventions to decrease the prevalence of workplace violence within inpatient settings.

Objective: The ROVR initiative's objective was to implement a pilot program focused on three main goals: identifying patients at high risk of violence towards staff and equipping all parties with risk mitigation strategies; improving staff satisfaction and safety by teaching methods to manage high-risk patients; and increasing staff awareness of workplace violence and the resources available to address it.

Planning/Research Methods: The ROVR initiative's planning and research phase targeted two inpatient nursing units known for high rates of patient-related violence. The WPV team developed a screening tool to identify patients prone to violent behaviors. The pilot, running from November 2022 to August 2023, saw 20,416 screenings and included 270 patients. To gauge the initiative's effectiveness, staff perceptions were evaluated through a pre- and post-intervention survey with 10 Likert-scale questions, focusing on changes in staff attitudes and their confidence in managing workplace violence.

Implementation Methods: Prior to the pilot program's launch, designated unit staff underwent detailed training on the application of screening tools and the principles of workplace violence prevention. The screening was implemented for every patient at the beginning of each shift to maintain a consistent assessment process, which included reevaluating patients already in the ROVR program. The ROVR team's social workers, led by a specialist in behavioral health, were pivotal in the daily examination of screening outcomes each morning, a step crucial for accurately identifying patients who qualified for the program. Following the identification of eligible patients, these social workers engaged in close collaboration with the patient and nursing team to develop individualized behavioral plans. These plans were meticulously incorporated into the patients' medical records to ensure continuity and a high standard of care. Furthermore, the ROVR team's daily presence on the units underscored their essential role as ongoing support for both patients and staff, thereby streamlining the pilot program's implementation and achieving its intended goals effectively.

Results: The implementation of the Operation Reduce Occupational Violence Rates (ROVR) initiative has proven effective in enhancing staff ability to identify and mitigate early warning signs of potential workplace violence, thereby improving their overall sense of safety. Specifically, there was a notable 15% increase in the staff's comfort level with recognizing behaviors indicative of potential violence or aggression. Furthermore, access to one of the key intervention tools, the behavior safety plans, saw a significant rise from 42% to 85%, highlighting the improved readiness of staff to address and manage situations of workplace violence effectively. Baseline data prior to the ROVR implementation indicated that 44% of staff considered the organization to be effective in preventing workplace violence, and 47% felt likely to report instances of verbal abuse. Following the implementation of ROVR, these perceptions showed marked improvement. The perceived effectiveness of the organization in preventing workplace violence increased by 17%, and there was a 26% rise in the likelihood of staff reporting verbal abuse. These outcomes underscore the substantial impact of the ROVR initiative in fostering a safer and more responsive work environment within the healthcare setting.