



anf policy

# australian nursing federation

## zero tolerance of violence and aggression in the workplace

It is the policy of the Australian Nursing Federation that:

1. Nurses and midwives have the right to work in a safe and healthy workplace free from violence and aggression.<sup>1</sup>
2. Aggressive and violent behaviour toward nurses and midwives is unacceptable and should not be tolerated in any workplace.
3. Occupational violence and aggression is any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances arising out of, or during the course of, their work and includes:
  - verbal, physical or psychological abuse;
  - threats or other intimidating behaviours;
  - physical attack, such as hitting, pinching or scratching;
  - aggravated assault;
  - threats with a weapon or objects; and
  - sexual harassment and sexual assault.
4. The effective prevention and management of violence and aggression in the health care industry is in the interests of all including nurses and midwives, employers, patients, and the wider community.
5. The source of violence and aggression can be any person, including patients, families and friends of patients, members of the public and work colleagues.<sup>2</sup>
6. Nurses and midwives have the right to expect that employers will:
  - a. implement policies and procedures supporting a zero tolerance approach to occupational violence and aggression;
  - b. consult with nurses and midwives and their representatives, including the ANF and occupational health and safety (OHS) representatives, in the development and review of policies and procedures;
  - c. comply with their legal obligations under relevant OHS legislation to proactively protect nurses and midwives from risks to their physical and psychological health and safety, including from occupational violence;
  - d. implement integrated systems to prevent and manage occupational violence and aggression based on a risk management framework, involving the proactive identification, assessment and control of the risk of violent and aggressive behaviour including development of clinical and treatment protocols to reduce risks;

anf policy  
zero tolerance  
of violence and  
aggression in  
the workplace

- e. provide a secure and safe physical environment, including buildings, grounds and car parks, through such measures as:
    - minimising public access points;
    - implementing systems for staff to screen visitors;
    - providing safe furniture and fittings;
    - designing appropriate reception and waiting areas; and
    - designing appropriate facilities for the admission and care of patients, including patients with potentially challenging behaviours
  - f. develop and implement policies and procedures for nurses and midwives working in isolation or external to the facility;
  - g. provide sufficient staffing levels and skills mix to ensure the safety and security of nurses, midwives and patients;
  - h. provide information, training and education to nurses and midwives on workplace policies and procedures, including capacity to respond to incidents, measures to prevent and control risks of violence, and to respond to and defuse situations;
  - i. provide equipment for summoning assistance in an emergency, eg duress alarms, mobile or satellite telephones or pagers for nurses and midwives working within and outside a health facility;
  - j. develop and implement an alert system for individuals known to be aggressive;
  - k. provide adequate response systems to cover incidents within the facility for nurses and midwives working in external environments;
  - l. have procedures for the reporting, investigation and analysis of incidents which will encourage nurses and midwives to report all incidents of violence and aggression;
  - m. respond to all reports of violence and aggression toward nurses and midwives;
  - n. develop post-incident policies and procedures including the treatment, de-briefing, counselling and support of affected nurses and midwives;
  - o. implement a hierarchy of sanctions against offenders, including measures such as verbal warnings, written warnings, contracts of acceptable behaviour, conditional visits and withdrawal of service or access to facilities as appropriate;
  - p. report offences to police and pursue laying of charges and prosecutions against offenders where appropriate; and
  - q. develop procedures for risk assessment including risk analysis of individuals based on known contributors or factors associated with inappropriate behaviour e.g. alcohol, drugs and mental illness.
7. Nurses and midwives must report to management all:
- security breaches;
  - dangerous or potentially dangerous situations; and
  - incidents of violent or aggressive behaviour.

anf policy  
zero tolerance  
of violence and  
aggression in  
the workplace

8. Nurses and midwives must raise with management and with their OHS representative or committee any safety or security issues which come to their attention.
9. Nurses and midwives must comply with reasonable instructions including wearing of duress alarms and compliance with policies and procedures.
10. Nurses and midwives should participate in OHS consultation opportunities to enhance the safety of self and others.
11. Nurses and midwives have the right to:
  - a. be treated with respect;
  - b. be consulted on matters related to management of the risk of violence, including procedures, facility design, systems of work and equipment;
  - c. be informed of, and receive training in, policies, procedures, legal rights and responsibilities, services and resources available to assist staff to prevent and manage occupational violence and aggression;
  - d. make their own assessments of the degree of risk to themselves, and not put themselves at risk, even if directed to by their employer;
  - e. withdraw themselves to a safe area or defend themselves with the use of reasonable force if physically assaulted;
  - f. access to a health professional of choice for the purpose of recovery from the effects of occupational violence or aggression;
  - g. report threats, abuse and assaults to the police, and to be involved in any subsequent investigations and proceedings in the justice system;
  - h. workers' compensation for any physical or psychological injury suffered as a result of occupational violence or aggression; and
  - i. rehabilitation and return to work so as to achieve the maximum possible functionality, activity and quality of life possible.

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*adopted by federal executive november 2008*

#### references

1. Numerous studies confirm that nursing is one of the occupations at highest risk of occupational violence and aggression, including:
  - Australia Institute of Criminology. 1999. *Violence within the Workplace*. Research and Public Policy series, No 22 p.46.
  - Farrell, G. and Bobrowski, C. 2003. *Scoping Workplace Aggression in Nursing [SWAN] Research Report*. University of Tasmania, Tasmanian School of Nursing.
  - Mayhew, C. and Chappell, D. 2003. The occupational violence experiences of 400 Australian health workers: an exploratory study. *Journal of Occupational Health and Safety, Australia and New Zealand*, 19(6):3-43.
2. See also ANF policy *Harassment, victimisation and bullying in the workplace*.