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WORKPLACE VIOLENCE: ASSESSING YOUR HOSPITAL'S READINESS AFTER THE VIRGINIA TECH MURDERS

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Were the murders at Virginia Tech an isolated event, proof that nothing can be done to stop a madman with a gun? The event was certainly not isolated. The threat of violence in schools and workplaces is clearly real. If we have learned anything from these senseless, heartbreaking occurrences, it is that they can happen anywhere, at almost any time. Fortunately, we have also learned that there are some things hospitals can do to minimize the threat of violence toward their employees, patients and visitors.

A vital step towards prevention lies in creating a culture of vigilance. With respect to the issue of violence, hospitals should adopt and enforce true "zero tolerance" policies. Employee assistance programs (EAPs) or other resources should be available, whereby a threatened employee can receive counseling and/or other protection from domestic-related violence. An effective and consistently enforced progressive disciplinary policy, so that termination or discipline almost never come as a surprise to the employee, can reduce the risk of violence. Employees should be reminded of the vital role that they play in maintaining a safe, secure workplace.

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