HEALTHCARE
WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

SCHA South Carolina
Hospital Association
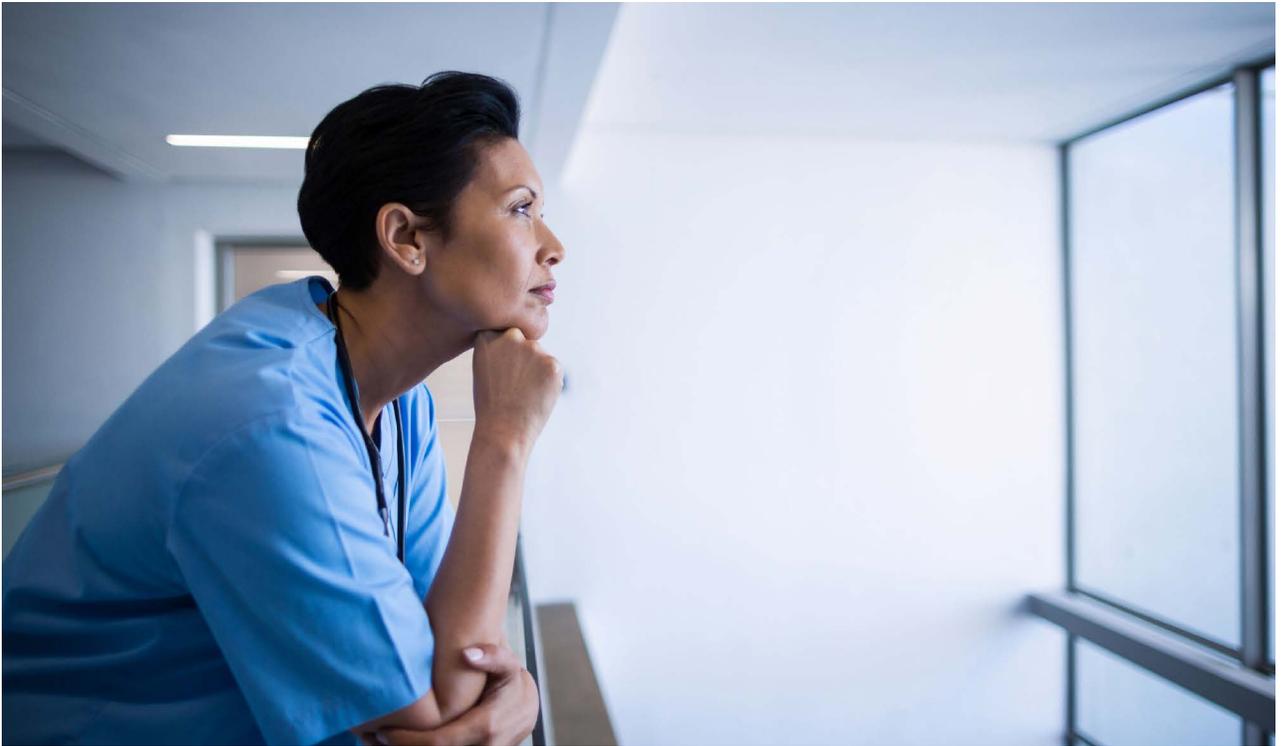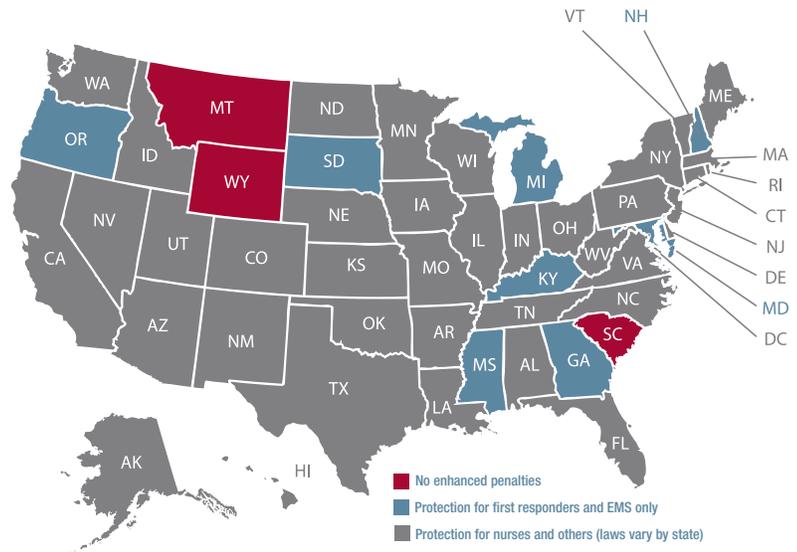
Workplace violence is a major safety issue in hospitals and health systems across South Carolina.
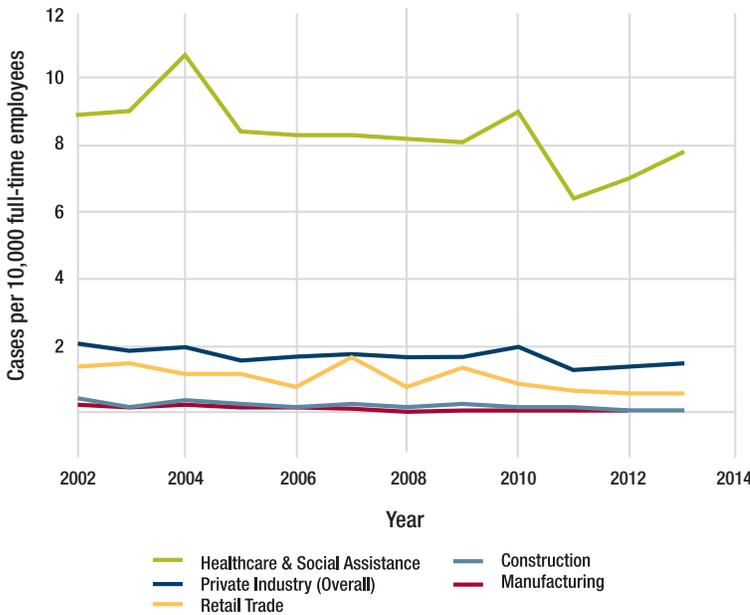
The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) defines workplace violence as "any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening disruptive behavior that occurs at the work site." Patients with violent and abusive tendencies are increasingly using hospital emergency departments rather than specialized facilities for treatment. Much of this is due to limited access to health coverage and mental health and substance abuse services. In addition, violent individuals are often abandoned in emergency departments by law enforcement or other individuals. OSHA has identified many risk factors that make healthcare workers uniquely susceptible to violence and abuse:

- Working with people who have a history of violence
- Working with people who have behavioral health or substance abuse issues
- Lifting, moving, transporting and touching patients
- Working alone
- Environmental design that may block vision or escape routes
- Working in neighborhoods with high crime rates
- High worker turnover
- Long wait times and overcrowded waiting rooms
- Unrestricted public access
- Perception that violence is tolerated and reporting incidents will have no effect

Meanwhile, sources indicate that South Carolina is one of three states with no enhanced penalties for violence against healthcare workers.[1]
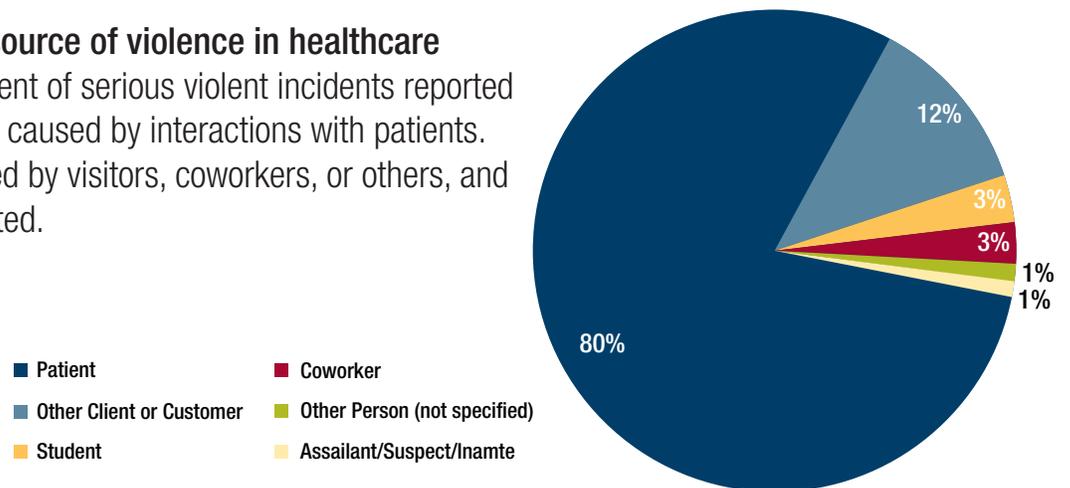

No enhanced penalties

Protection for first responders and EMS only

Protection for nurses and others (laws vary by state)

Violent Injuries Resulting in Days Away from Work, by Industry, 2002-2013[2]

Cases per 10,000 full-time employees

Year

Healthcare & Social Assistance
Private Industry (Overall)
Retail Trade
Construction
Manufacturing

According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics, incidents of workplace violence were four times more common in healthcare than private industry from 2002 to 2013. The "healthcare and social assistance" sector had approximately eight cases of serious workplace violence per 10,000 employees while other large sectors like construction and manufacturing had fewer than two cases per 10,000 employees.

Healthcare Worker Injuries Resulting in Days Away from Work, by Source[3]

Patients are the largest source of violence in healthcare settings. In 2013, 80 percent of serious violent incidents reported in healthcare settings were caused by interactions with patients. Other incidents were caused by visitors, coworkers, or others, and many incidents go unreported.

12%
3%
3%
1%
1%
80%

Patient
Other Client or Customer
Student
Coworker
Other Person (not specified)
Assailant/Suspect/Inamte

Many of these violent incidents go unreported. A 2014 study showed that 80% of emergency medical workers will experience physical violence during their careers, but less than half will report the incidents to police. There are cultural challenges unique to healthcare that contribute to the underreporting of workplace violence:

- Caregivers feel an ethical duty to "do no harm" and will put their own safety before a patient's
- Caregivers believe these instances to be unintentional and part of the job
- Caregivers do not want to stigmatize assailants with mental illnesses or behavioral disorders
- Caregivers fear retaliation when assailants are released

Acts of violence contribute to lost productivity and inefficiencies that impact the cost of care. The estimated cost of community violence for U.S. hospitals and health systems was approximately $2.7 billion in 2016. $1.5 billion of that is directly tied to security and medical care for injured employees. In addition to harming employees, violent incidents bring inefficiencies and challenges that negatively impact patient care and healthcare costs.

1. Philips, J. P., M.D. (2016). Workplace Violence against Health Care Workers in the United States. The New England Journal of Medicine, 374;17

2. Data Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics data for intentional injuries caused by humans, excluding self-inflicted injuries

3. Data Source: Data source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), 2013 data. These data cover three broad industry sectors: ambulatory healthcare services, hospitals, and nursing and residential care facilities. Source categories are defined by BLS.