

Leveraging Community Partnerships to Take a Stand Against Hospital Violence

Background

Violence continues to affect hospitals and health systems across the country, and central Connecticut-based Bristol Health is not immune to it.

However, Bristol Health leaders have greatly reduced violent incidents in their organization within just three years. By upgrading their incident reporting system, boosting prevention education, and supporting employees, Bristol leaders forged an organization-wide culture of safety. They also meticulously track data to help prevent future incidents, and have gained crucial support from local stakeholders and policymakers, ultimately inspiring potential policy changes that could have a lasting benefit to health care workers.

Bristol's Approach

Bristol operates with a data-driven approach to incident reporting, interventions and feedback, which ultimately fosters a cycle of continuous improvement. Leaders encourage staff to document through an incident reporting system any violent event they experience, kickstarting a process where a Support Our Staff — or SOS — team reaches out to affected employees and connects them to resources such as counseling.

A safety committee meets monthly to track all violent events, analyze trends and pinpoint potential solutions, weaving in staff responses to help inform future prevention efforts.

"We engage frontline workers in the process of making decisions and making change happen, because they are vested in it," President Kurt Barwis says. This ultimately strengthens trust, helping foster a true culture of safety.



Bristol Health

For example, Bristol leaders replaced a contracted security team with in-house resources after considering employee concerns. They also added panic buttons and increased security to their emergency department (ED). Additionally, Bristol's leadership team rounds after workplace violence incidents, and checks in with staff — making sure that employees are heard and feel protected.

"We hear feedback, we engage, and we start making changes immediately," says Christine Laprise, vice president for operations. "We've created a culture where staff feel that if they raise an issue, something's going to be done about it."

Community support and advocacy creates awareness, accountability

Bristol leaders have also reached outside their organization's walls to accelerate change. For example, Bristol has closely collaborated with the local police department for more than a decade, training staff on active shooter protocols, security assessments — even traffic concerns. Police Chief

Brian Gould credits their partnership to “strong lines of communication.”

“Any potential issues that arise — we’re in complete communication with each other,” Gould says.

“It’s important for everybody at the hospital, from patients to people providing the care, that they have that open dialogue with us to address any concerns.”

Bristol leaders also regularly debrief violent incidents with other community partners, including Bristol’s board of directors, legislators, and community members, to improve future safety prevention efforts — and motivate others to action.

For example, Bristol leaders showed its board footage from a graphic ED incident, which was a real “a-ha moment,” for board members and motivated them to advocate for change, Barwis says.

Bristol also convened a meeting between frontline employees with state legislators, where employees detailed their firsthand experiences with violence. “It was part of their healing process for employees just to feel heard and to share their story,” says Chris Ann Meaney, chief operating officer. “And also powerful for legislators to not just look at numbers, but to look at the human beings who are affected.”

The meeting may also ultimately strengthen state laws that could help protect health care workers — a goal Bristol leaders have been working toward for years, Barwis says. While nothing is yet final, Barwis is encouraged by legislators’ response.

“A key takeaway for my team was that often you get laws that you settle for,” Barwis says. “But that doesn’t mean you can’t take a second, third or even fourth bite at the apple in future years.”

Impact

Bristol’s community outreach, training, and reporting have led to a significantly safer workplace. In 2019, Bristol recorded 152 incidents of workplace violence. In 2022, even with increased reporting, it recorded just 24 incidents.

Staff feel supported, as well: Employee engagement survey results show that Bristol’s efforts have improved employee satisfaction and feelings of safety. Anecdotally, staff have shared feedback that they feel their concerns are heard and acted upon.

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