



# **WORKPLACE VIOLENCE & HOSPITALS: A GUIDE TO STRATEGIC SECURITY INVESTMENT**

**Four security experts offer tactical advice to help hospital executives meaningfully improve workplace safety**

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## INTRODUCTION

It's no secret that the healthcare industry is subject to unique challenges that make for dangerous working environments. Persons with substance abuse problems and victims of violent crime regularly enter emergency departments. Patients with extreme behavioral health issues can overwhelm a hospital's capacity for appropriate treatment due to a lack of available resources, which can lead to additional security concerns. High foot traffic contributes to increased crimes of opportunity. Knives, gun violence, and other forms of physical assault are witnessed all too often in hospitals today.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics<sup>1</sup>, healthcare workers are five times more likely to be victims of workplace violence compared to other workers in the US. Healthcare workers account for 73% of all non-fatal workplace injuries and illnesses in the country.

It's clear that something has to change, and it needs to change quickly. Healthcare facilities need to make meaningful investments in security, from partnering with experienced leaders and pursuing certifications to training clinical staff and investing in technology.

Axon has partnered with some of the healthcare industry's most experienced security professionals to highlight the issues that facilities face today. This paper shares their assessment of the issues at hand and highlights their proposed solutions for mitigating harm in healthcare environments.

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1) [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)



# INSIDE THE RISE OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE IN HOSPITALS

*“Healthcare is the most violent industry in the United States. We’re facing significant challenges with worker shortages, lack of nurses, and turnover. All of those pressures can be traced back to our capacity to provide a safe environment to the staff who work in our facilities.”*

— **Mike Hodges, Piedmont Healthcare**

Workplace violence in hospitals is on the rise: The rate of injuries from violent attacks against medical professionals grew by 63% from 2011 to 2018<sup>2</sup>. The COVID-19 pandemic heightened the strain,<sup>3</sup> but it’s hardly the only factor at play. Since the 1990s, emergency visits per capita have steadily increased, while the number of emergency departments has decreased.<sup>4</sup> Today 47.7% of hospital-associated medical care is delivered via emergency departments.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, behavioral health patients have continued to outstrip hospital capacity and cause renewed security concerns.

## / WORKPLACE VIOLENCE CORRELATES TO LABOR SHORTAGES

In a 2022 survey by National Nurses United,<sup>6</sup> the nation’s largest union of registered nurses, 48% of nurses reported an increase in workplace violence — more than double the percentage from a year earlier. It’s no small wonder that hospitals struggle to recruit and retain new healthcare workers, as the industry faces a shortage of critical frontline staff.<sup>7</sup> If current workforce trends continue, over 6.5 million individuals will leave low-wage healthcare occupations within the next five years with only 1.9 million taking their place.

Nurse staffing is a significant issue for healthcare organizations today. In September 2022, roughly 15,000 Minnesota nurses walked off the job to protest understaffing and overwork.<sup>8</sup> This historic strike was triggered, in part, because of safety concerns. According to the Minnesota Nurses Association, some hospitals have offered increased safety protocols for reporting incidents, but have not conceded to broader safety and staffing-related demands.

*“Recruitment is an issue across the board, for both clinical and security staff. Many organizations now rely on contract employees because they simply can’t retain workers seeking more competitive wages.”*

— **Joe Magana, Norton Healthcare**

## / THE COST OF INACTION

Turnover is one of the largest financial issues that hospitals face. Each percentage change in RN turnover rates can cost or save a facility \$270,800 per year.<sup>9</sup> Currently, the national average turnover rate for nurses is 8.8% to 37.0% depending on location and specialty.<sup>10</sup>

Research shows that national in-facility violence costs \$428.5 million, including \$234.2 million for staff turnover, \$42.3 million in medical care and indemnity for employee victims of violence, and \$90.7 million in disability and absenteeism costs. In 2016, US hospitals had an estimated total of \$967.4 billion in total expenses, with an estimated 0.5% of that going to security costs based on an analysis of 178 California hospitals.<sup>11</sup>

2) [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)

3) [American Hospital Association](#)

4) [American Hospital Association](#)

5) [Sage Journals](#)

6) [National Nurses United](#)

7) [Mercer](#)

8) [Washington Post](#)

9) [New Jersey State Nurse’s Association](#)

10) [National Library of Medicine](#)

11) [American Hospital Association](#)



Given the gravity of the situation, why aren't hospital administrators making changes? One reason is a lack of alignment between security and the broader organization. It's crucial that security leaders are able to advocate for support for their programs. But healthcare organizations can be fragmented, with stakeholders from different divisions competing for the same limited resources. Hospital administrators and executives must learn to communicate and collaborate with security staff. Together, these stakeholders can design security programs that meet the needs of their organization and make effective use of budgetary resources.

## HOW TO MEET THE SECURITY CHALLENGE

### 1. REFRAME SECURITY AS AN INVESTMENT

One crucial step healthcare leaders can take today is to reframe the way they view security, as it's fundamentally different from other support services. Simply referring to security as a cost center undervalues its impact and begins resourcing discussions from a perspective of expense. As a result, hospitals may choose to invest in programs or equipment that seemingly have a higher ROI. It's a costly mistake.

*“Security is simply different from other non-clinical support, like janitorial services. It is much more professional now than it ever has been, and it requires ongoing resources to continue to be effective... Overall, I think we need to change our mindset and language around security. Security truly is an investment.”*

— Bryan Warren, WarSec Security

### 2. HIRE THE RIGHT SECURITY LEADERS

Before overhauling any security program, hospital administrators should ensure their security leadership is up to the task. Experienced security leaders will be capable of leveraging all state and federal resources available to bolster security programs. The Oregon Health Association of Hospitals and Health Systems' Workplace Safety Initiative<sup>12</sup> is one example, providing a robust framework for workplace violence preparedness training across organizational silos. Security leaders should also know how to tap into the broader community to gain meaningful insights.

Above all, your security leadership should be able to help you answer these three questions:

WHAT IS COMMON PRACTICE IN THE HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY?	WHAT MEASURES ARE MANDATED OR REQUIRED BY REGULATORY AUTHORITIES?	WHAT IS THE RISK AND FINANCIAL IMPACT OF CONTINUING AS WE ARE TODAY?
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Often, even if a certain security investment isn't mandated, you could set yourself on a path to certification by pursuing it.

*“Successful healthcare security leaders strategically position themselves, their security programs, and the healthcare security profession for the future. They are peer reviewed professionals pursuing certifications such as CPP, PSP, PSI, and CHPA through the American Society for International Security (ASIS), and the International Association for Healthcare Security & Safety. (IAHSS). They develop multi-layered security programs using best practices, IAHSS guidelines, and merge these requirements and standards into the organization's business model & culture. Finally, the most successful healthcare leaders share two commonalities. First, they are bold, innovative, and not afraid to think outside the box or try new or untested methodologies. Second, they understand how to develop and present metrics to administration to validate their concepts and demonstrate the value security brings to the organization.”*

— Bill Marcisz, Strategic Security Management Consulting

12) [Oregon Health Association of Hospitals and Health Systems](#)



### **/ 3. GET OUT OF REACTION MODE**

Today nurses are more likely to be assaulted at work than police officers. In that kind of environment, preparation is key to making staff feel safe. Fundamentally, hospital security requires a proactive approach.

***“In assessing hospital security programs, it is still common to see a preponderance of security measures focused on ‘response’ and little thought given to prevention. While healthcare security programs require both prevention & response methods and capabilities, the greater emphasis should be on prevention. The best and most progressive healthcare security programs embrace and utilize corporate security concepts such as enterprise security risk management (ESRM). This includes a focus on root cause analyses, business continuity, risk mitigation, and liability avoidance. Hospital security and workplace violence programs should be 75% prevention and about 25% response.”***

**— Bill Marcisz, Strategic Security Management Consulting**

All hospital staff should be trained on de-escalation procedures and equipped with the tools to mitigate the threat of physical violence. The Joint Commission has published a useful framework of de-escalation procedures<sup>13</sup> that most hospitals can adopt, which will assist frontline employees with recognizing aggressive patients, deterring violence, and understanding the various approaches to doing so. In designing your workplace violence training program, take care to define the types of threats clinical and security staff can expect to encounter on a daily basis. It's also essential to lay out clear reporting and escalation protocol since underreporting remains a serious issue in the industry at large.

Employee preparedness shouldn't be the only consideration. Environmental factors, such as the layout of furniture within hospital rooms, should also be part of your security strategy.

***“Consider where workstations, medical equipment, and furniture are arranged, keeping in mind that nurses routinely work alone in patient care environments. A recommendation would be to place visitation chairs and other furniture furthest away from the door and workstations closest to the door, where staff have a direct line of sight to the patient and guests. This would improve environmental awareness, provide a smooth flow process when entering and exiting the room, and a quick exit if there is a safety concern. These small changes can make a big difference.”***

**— Joe Magana, Norton Healthcare**

Integration with other hospital staff is the primary tool security teams have to make sure that healthcare workers are protected. Hospitals should budget their security teams the time and resources they need to prepare the rest of the staff for emergencies.

It's also crucial to keep in mind that proactivity and prevention are possible, but prediction is not. There are too many variables at play: At any time, a patient may have a bad reaction to a medication, a psychiatric patient may become triggered, or a violent individual could enter the emergency department. So hospital administrators should take the dynamic nature of these security challenges into account.

***“Hospital security doesn't lend itself to efficiency models like ‘six sigma’ or ‘lean’ because they assume there's a repeatable, predictable process in place. There's always something going on, and we will never prevent every incident. There's no such thing as zero risk.”***

**— Bryan Warren, WarSec Security**

13) [The Joint Commission](#)



#### **/ 4. DESIGN A HOLISTIC PROGRAM**

As in designing any company-wide program, start by considering your mission, vision, and values. Security protocols should begin and end with the staff and patient experience in mind. You should also account for the nuances of your organizational culture, rather than defaulting to tried-and-true practices. Aim to develop organizational standards, but allow the flexibility to afford different divisions or locations more resources.

Unlike other areas of your organization, security lacks an established formula for allocating resources. The sporadic nature of violent events can create tightrope scenarios as facilities try to reduce costs by trimming the “fat” of a security budget. Lean on the people on the ground to help you accurately assess the need.

***“There is no industry-accepted staffing formula for how many security officers should be in a hospital. I designed a formula, which I've found effective, but to a certain degree, it's always a subjective issue.”***

**— Mike Hodges, Piedmont Healthcare**

Because of these ever-changing variables, many security leaders struggle to quantify the resources they need to do their jobs properly. To fully understand the security department's needs, you should encourage a culture of collaboration between security leaders and Risk Management. Security is insurance, and Risk Managers will likely be able to provide a more comprehensive, holistic breakdown of how investing money in security will provide long-term benefits to the organization.

***“Security leaders need to start thinking more in the terms of business terminology. When we're looking at strategic goals for resourcing, staffing, equipment, or systems, we need to leverage relationships with Risk Management and clinical leadership. Collaboration with other departments is essential in proving the value of any security investment.”***

**— Bryan Warren, WarSec Security**

#### **/ 5. INVEST IN THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY**

It's crucial to invest in the right tools to stop active violence. Hospital security professionals are liable to encounter gun and knife violence, as well as other kinds of physical assault, while on duty. When de-escalation isn't possible, security teams need access to safe use-of-force equipment. In any healthcare setting, the goal is to help people. Security professionals need to be able to neutralize threats in the safest way possible.

***“TASERS allow security professionals to respond to violence and make the scene safe as immediately and effectively as possible...Body-worn cameras give us a professional edge because they give us the capacity to review incidents, debrief effectively, learn from our mistakes, learn from our successes and grow...Digital evidence management lets us share that evidence with the key stakeholders that need to review it and maintain transparency”***

**— Mike Hodges, Piedmont Healthcare**



/ TASERs	/ BODY-WORN CAMERAS	/ DIGITAL EVIDENCE MANAGEMENT
<b>Application</b> TASERs are a conducted energy weapon (CEW) that allows security professionals a safer option for use-of-force scenarios.	<b>Application</b> These small wearable devices allow security staff to review incidents with accuracy.	<b>Application</b> DEM systems allow security professionals to upload media via mobile devices, document incidents, and review transcriptions with ease.
<b>Benefits</b> TASERs allow officers to neutralize assailants from a distance, reducing injuries. These weapons are also a non-lethal alternative to firearms.	<b>Benefits</b> Camera footage allows for more transparency with stakeholders and better decision-making in future scenarios.	<b>Benefits</b> DEMs eliminate data silos and offer transparency without exposing your organization to infosec risks.

/ SURVEILLANCE CAMERAS	/ PANIC DEVICES	/ ACCESS CONTROL SYSTEM
<b>Application</b> In-building cameras can activate based on motion sensors to record incidents, and even identify sounds linked to gun detection.	<b>Application</b> These user-activated push buttons allow clinical staff to signal for help when they need it most.	<b>Application</b> Access control is a blanket term that describes technology that prohibits entry to restricted areas, such as turnstiles or security doors.
<b>Benefits</b> A modern camera system will alert security staff to incidents quickly and retain footage to inform future security decisions.	<b>Benefits</b> Unlike a pager or intercom system, panic buttons can be activated with a single push without alerting the assailant. future scenarios.	<b>Benefits</b> Modern access control systems are streamlined and aesthetically pleasing while offering the same basic security.





# STAND STRONGER TOGETHER

*“Remember this is a team sport and you’ll need everyone actively engaged in the game, from every officer up to the C-Suite. Remain positive no matter if funding is available or not. Continue to be proactive, join the International Association for Healthcare Security & Safety, check out Axon’s Healthcare Security Initiative, and get to know other healthcare security practitioners. You don’t have to do this alone, as there are many leaders willing to extend a hand to help. When I joined healthcare security in 2002 two great security leaders, Bryan Warren and Tim Portale, coached and mentored me and I have the responsibility to pay it forward. There are many more security leaders who I have met on my journey and they all have been willing to help whenever called upon. I believe we all believe in servant leadership, where we’re focused on serving others and do our very best to create the safest environment possible.”*

— Joe Magana, Norton Healthcare

Safety is not the individual effort or responsibility of anyone, but an ideology for an entire hospital ecosystem to abide by. While security officers should spearhead efforts within their hospitals, everyone within the facility should maintain an understanding of security procedures to ensure that the hospital is a safe environment for patients, healthcare workers, and other staff alike.

It’s crucial that everyone contributes to the goal of a safe environment to the best of their ability, whether that’s a frontline worker respecting proper procedures or C-Suite executives ensuring that budgetary needs are met for the health of the security department. The proper tools, training, and staffing to maintain a safe hospital should be considered as central to the operation as standard operating equipment.

It’s equally important to remember the context in which we now find ourselves. The coronavirus pandemic took a heavy psychological toll on the entire world, though healthcare workers certainly took the brunt of it. They deserve to feel safe in exchange for the long hours and sweat they put in as hospital beds filled and resources were spread thin. By providing healthcare workers with the environment they deserve, we may be able to ease the tensions of working in the industry.

Together, we can create a more effective, more collaborative healthcare system that puts safety first.

## / AXON CAN HELP

Axon has been a key technology partner for healthcare security leaders for over a decade. Within that time, we’ve seen first-hand how tools like our **TASER 7**, **Body 3 cameras**, and **Digital Incident Management System** can make an impact on hospitals. A number of studies have quantified that impact:

IN ONE STUDY, TASERS REDUCED GUARD INJURIES BY 70% AND ASSAILANT INJURIES BY 40%	IN ANOTHER, HOSPITAL SECURITY USED TASERS TO SUCCESSFULLY DE-ESCALATE 80% OF SITUATIONS WITHOUT THE NEED FOR FORCE.	TASERS HAVE OVER 4 MILLION FIELD USERS. OVER 800 STUDIES AFFIRM THE TOOL’S SAFETY AND EFFICACY.
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If you need a security technology partner with a proven track record, **contact us today.**



## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS



### **/ MIKE HODGES SYSTEM DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC SAFETY**

PIEDMONT HEALTHCARE

Mike Hodges is a pioneer in proactive security solutions with over 18 years of experience in the field. In his role as Systems Director of Public Safety at Piedmont Healthcare in Athens, Georgia, he led the development of a collaborative workplace violence prevention program that has reduced incidents of workplace violence by over 50%. Mike has published numerous articles related to violence prevention and officer training, he currently manages the Proactive Security blog, and is the co-host of the Proactive Security Podcast.



### **/ BILL MARCISZ PRESIDENT & CHIEF CONSULTANT**

STRATEGIC SECURITY MANAGEMENT CONSULTING

Bill Marcisz is a security expert, consultant, and attorney with over 40 years of combined security management and complex litigation experience. His management philosophy emphasizes organization-wide partnerships, business continuity, and disaster recovery initiatives. Bill merges disciplines to deliver cost-effective, value-added security services and loss-prevention solutions. He delivers services and investigations in a thorough and objective manner, consistent with professional ethics and applicable laws.



### **/ BRYAN WARREN PRESIDENT**

WARSEC SECURITY

Bryan Warren specializes in security assessment and training for the healthcare industry. He is a Certified Healthcare Protection Administrator, has a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice, an MBA focusing on legal foundations of healthcare, and over 34 years of healthcare security experience. He is a Past President of the International Association for Healthcare Security and Safety and has most recently been engaged with the creation of The Joint Commission's new Workplace Violence Standards.



### **/ JOE MAGANA SYSTEM DIRECTOR FOR SECURITY**

SAFETY, AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS, NORTON HEALTHCARE

Joe Magana has served in the Marine Corps for 20 years with security leadership experience at the American Embassies in Jerusalem, Israel and Berlin, Germany, and hand selected as a State Department / Marine Corps instructor to train officers to guard Embassies overseas. He has been in healthcare security for the past 20 years at the hospital, regional, and system level. He has held his current role at Norton Healthcare for the better part of a decade and has transformed Norton Healthcare from 75% contract security to a 100% proprietary security program, has deep expertise in managing security concerns across various locations and environments. He designs cohesive security, technology, and training programs that also address issues of various locales holistically.



## ABOUT AXON

With over 26 years of advancing technology, Axon is dedicated to a bold and powerful mission to Protect Life and Obsolete the Bullet. Axon is the global leader of connected public safety technologies. We stand for protecting life, protecting truth, transparency, and accountability. Rick Smith founded Axon (formerly TASER International) following the deaths of two high school friends who were gunned down in an act of road rage. This tragedy sparked a passion in Rick to seek new technologies that would enable people to protect themselves without deploying lethal force. Our connected body-worn camera technology and evidence-management cloud are designed to help police officers work efficiently, effectively, and transparently. Axon's mission from the start has been to make the bullet obsolete, reduce social conflict and ensure criminal justice systems are fair and effective.

