

Managing the risks of

Violence at work in aged care facilities



The risk of violence at work in aged care facilities increases:

When residents have not been screened

People who refer residents to aged care facilities should pass on information about the resident where the health and safety of staff could be at risk. This information can often be obtained from the resident, relatives of the resident or the admitting doctor.

Where information about residents is not available, aged care facilities need to develop protocols to ensure that information is obtained.

These protocols should include:

- preliminary assessments of the resident
- resident interviews
- liaising with the referring agency.

Note: Any information that is collected must recognise the need for resident confidentiality and only involve issues that relate to the potential or real risks of aggression.

When residents are unable to manage themselves

Residents may have unstable or changeable mental states as the result of illnesses, pain, drugs therapy etc. As a result they may demonstrate aggressive behaviour. As such it is important that aged care facilities ensure that the resident's health status and any potential risks to the health, safety and welfare of staff are assessed on a regular basis.

When staff are working with residents who have previously shown aggressive or violent behaviour

Aged care facilities should investigate each report of resident aggression and implement appropriate control measures. When it is inappropriate or unreasonable to eliminate the risk of aggression by withdrawing the service, consideration needs to be given to minimising the risk of resident aggression by:

- reviewing the nursing care plan of the resident (medication, pain management etc)

- ensuring that staff work in pairs with high risk clients
- providing training to staff concerning:
 - dementia and communicating with people with dementia
 - the procedures for preventing and managing aggression, including defusing potentially aggressive situations
 - emergency response procedures to be followed in a threatening situation
 - the identification of aggressive behaviour in residents
 - evasive self-defence techniques.

When the aged care facility is not prepared for the management of resident aggression

Aged care facilities should ensure that incidents of resident aggression are reported and documented. All incident reports should be investigated for cause and follow up action. Aged care facilities should ensure that:

- agency and temporary staff receive induction and training on health and safety procedures and risks
- facilities are adequate (number of chairs) and space in the day room is provided so that residents can maintain their personal space
- residents have the ability to take 'time out' away from other residents
- duress alarms are installed or carried in areas identified as high risk by staff
- sufficient staff are available to deal with workloads
- emergency response procedures exist for threatening situations
- work practices facilitate resident privacy
- work practices enable residents to exercise choice and a level of control over aspects of their daily activities
- dementing or confused residents are assessed for potentially aggressive behaviour
- the potential for aggressive behaviour is part of the nursing care plan for high risk residents
- issues regarding aggression are included in handover meetings.

During hours of darkness/working alone

Working alone or at night increases the risk of violence. In these circumstances there is increased cover for potential offenders and there usually are fewer people around. Possible risk control measures include:

- public access is restricted to one main entrance (especially at night)
- all external doors should be fitted with 'spy holes' to allow staff to establish the identity of visitors
- walkways between resident buildings and parking areas are well lit and not surrounded by obstructions
- external doors and windows are secured after dark and checked by night duty employees
- gardens and surrounds are designed to minimise potential hiding spots for intruders
- no cash or cheques are held on the premises out of office hours (indicate with signage)
- employees have a readily available method of raising the alarm in the case of an emergency
- emergency numbers and procedures are clearly documented for security emergencies
- employees receive training on potential security threats and security and emergency procedures
- employees working alone or at night have personal duress alarms
- communication is made on a regular basis with employees working alone or at night.

Note: Strategies to ensure the security and safety of wandering residents should not limit the ability for staff to escape in the case of an emergency.

For more information see the *Guidelines for reducing the risk of Violence at Work* available from WorkCover Corporation Customer Centre. The guidelines and industry brochures also are available for download from the Corporation's Internet site.

WorkCover Corporation

100 Waymouth Street, Adelaide
South Australia 5000

General enquiries: 13 18 55

Facsimile: (08) 8233 2990

Email: info@workcover.com

TTY calls: (08) 8233 2574 for people who are deaf or have hearing/speech impairments.

Non-English speaking: (08) 8226 1990 for information in languages other than English, call the Interpreting and Translating Centre and ask them to call WorkCover Corporation. This service is available at no cost to you.

© WorkCover Corporation of South Australia, 2002

All rights reserved

CS486. Printed November 2002

www.workcover.com

