

Chair of the Committee
Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety
Parliament of New South Wales
6 Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Mr. Geoff Provest

Re: Inquiry into Violence Against Emergency Personnel

The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) is pleased to provide a response to the *Inquiry into Violence Against Emergency Services Personnel*. ACN welcomes the inquiry and commends the New South Wales House of Parliament for proposing its establishment.

ACN is the national professional organisation for all nurse leaders and its aim is to ensure that the Australian community receives quality nursing care now and in the future. ACN is a membership organisation with members in all states and territories, health care settings and nursing specialties. ACN is also the Australian member of the International Council of Nurses headquartered in Geneva.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for further discussion of ACN's submission.

Yours sincerely



Adjunct Professor Kylie Ward
Chief Executive Officer
RN, MMgt, Dip App Sci (Nursing), Acute Care Cert, FACN, Wharton Fellow, MAICD

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Australian
College of
Nursing

Inquiry into Violence Against Emergency Services Personnel

Australian College of Nursing Submission

Inquiry into Violence Against Emergency

Services Personnel

Australian College of Nursing (ACN) is Australia's preeminent professional membership organisation with members in all states and territories, health care settings and nursing specialities and is an advocate for the nursing profession, advancing the skills and expertise of nurses to provide leadership in their contribution to the policy, practice and delivery of health care.

ACN has a strong interest in any measures that will serve to protect members of the nursing profession and the community from violent or aggressive behaviour exhibited by people and directed toward those entrusted with providing their care. ACN therefore calls on the New South Wales (NSW) Government to introduce firmer measures to deter violence against healthcare personnel.

In general, ACN believes violence and aggression toward health care providers, and those supporting the provision of such care to be a significant health and public affairs issue worldwide which occurs not just within emergency care. Although much of the literature on violence focuses on emergency departments in hospitals, it is not only nurses working in these environments who are subject to violence or aggression. Nurses working in a variety of settings, and especially out in the community are also subject to violence or aggression in an open and frequently vulnerable environment while delivering care. Unlike colleagues working in hospitals, these nurses do not have security staff available to assist and have to rely on contacting the police in emergencies. ACN urges the Committee to consider this in relation to any violence reduction strategies it may propose.

Evidence reporting the frequency of incidents remains largely anecdotal, with solid and consistent data on prevalence not routinely available. ACN notes with some concern that many nurses may often not report incidents of aggression or violence for various reasons including workload and a perception that such behaviour from patients, relatives or visitors is an inevitable consequence of working in healthcare. Exposure to violence and aggression should never be accepted as an acceptable part of anyone's work. It is not 'part of the job'. Incidents of violence against emergency service and health care personnel are and must be considered preventable. In order to truly support 'zero tolerance to violence', strategies must address this culture to ensure that health care providers are supported and empowered to routinely report violent or aggressive incidents which will help to highlight the true extent of the problem and improve workplace safety .

Despite existing health care policy requiring organisations to maintain a zero tolerance approach to violence, establish work systems and environments that enable, facilitate and support risk assessment and reduction, incidents of violence and aggression toward health care providers continue to occur. ACN believes that responsibility for preventing violence against health care personnel is a shared responsibility that requires a collaborative, responsible and supportive approach that extends beyond the concept of 'zero tolerance'.

Reduction strategies to address workplace violence in the health care setting must stem more from a preventative rather than a reactive approach that clearly identifies the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, from perpetrators, clinicians and organisations, to the police and justice system.

ACN would therefore urge the Committee to consider whether legislative changes that clearly identify these responsibilities are necessary to strengthen existing system requirements designed to protect emergency and healthcare personnel and to mandate penalties for those who perpetrate incidents of violence.