

APA Official Actions

Position Statement on Weapons Use in Hospitals and Patient Safety

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"Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. . . These are . . . position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects. . ." – *APA Operations Manual*

Issue:

The Joint Commission reports that the rate of injuries due to violence against health care workers, as well as occurrences of armed violence in the clinical and public spaces of hospitals, have increased. Because hospitals are designed as therapeutic spaces, it is especially important to maintain a safe and secure environment for patients, visitors, and staff. In response to these rising rates of violence, some hospitals have considered or implemented policies for the use of less-lethal weapons (e.g., pepper spray, tasers) by security staff and clinical staff. However, recent reports have described situations where weapons instead of clinical responses to psychiatric patient violence were used by security or police officers and patients were harmed.

One study of hospital-based shootings identified 154 such incidents between 2000 and 2011. In most cases, the circumstances raised questions about hospital safety policies and practices. For example, in 18% of the cases, perpetrators obtained the firearm in the hospital, taking a security or police officer's gun 8% of the time.

APA Position:

The use of weapons¹ in a clinical setting to manage behavioral dyscontrol conflicts with the therapeutic mission of healthcare institutions and should therefore be limited to use by properly trained and authorized law enforcement or security personnel only when an imminent risk of life-threatening injury exists that cannot be managed using the usual clinical responses (e.g., active shooter situations).

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¹ Weapons are here defined (as they are also defined in the CMS State Operations Manual: CMS. State Operations Manual Appendix A - Survey Protocol, Regulations and Interpretive Guidelines for Hospitals Section 482.13(e) https://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Manuals/downloads/som107ap_a_hospitals.pdf) as "includes, but is not limited to, pepper spray, mace, nightsticks, tasers [sic], cattle prods, stun guns, and pistols."