

Briefing on Private Members' Bill: Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Bill 2017-19

Summary

We firmly believe more action is necessary to protect our health care staff from violence and aggression. We welcome and support the intention of the Bill.

We believe that with further strengthening, this Bill will lead to tougher penalties against individuals who assault any of a range of health care workers in health and care as they seek to discharge their duties. The Bill will place in statute that such offences are aggravated when perpetrated against nursing staff and others working in emergency services. We hope it will act as a deterrent to those who perpetrate such crimes, as well as communicating the unacceptable nature of these actions to the public.

We are concerned by the narrow scope of health care staff covered by the Bill in comparison to other groups of workers. We call for the Bill to be amended to reflect the fact that emergency situations can happen in a wider variety of health care environments.

A separate study into violence within A&E departments found that the main triggers of violence and aggression

assessments, as required under health and safety law. Employing organisations need to carry out robust risk assessments and identify a range of preventative actions to minimise risks to staff these could include training in conflict resolution, de-escalation, the provision of lone worker alarms and well-designed environments.

However, we believe the acute shortage of registered nurses in England is contributing to the rise in assaults, with the length of time waiting to be seen by a health professional cited as a common factor behind assaults²⁰. Safe and effective staffing levels are therefore a critically important preventative measure to ensure that there are enough staff, with the right skills, to provide timely patient care, and therefore preventing potentially violent situations from escalating.

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