

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Joint Commission Alert: Violence Rising at Health Care Facilities

Controlling access, greater staff vigilance urged

(OAKBROOK TERRACE, Ill. – June 3, 2010) A new Joint Commission *Sentinel Event Alert* warns that health care facilities today are being confronted with steadily increasing rates of crime, including assault, rape and murder.

The *Sentinel Event Alert* urges greater attention to the issue of violence and to controlling access to facilities to protect patients, staff and visitors, noting that assault, rape and homicide are consistently in the top 10 types of serious events reported to The Joint Commission. The *Alert* cautions that the actual number of violent incidents is significantly under-reported and advises organizations to mandate the reporting of all real or perceived threats.

To prevent violence in health care facilities, The Joint Commission's *Sentinel Event Alert* newsletter suggests that facilities take a series of 13 specific steps, including the following:

- Evaluate the facility's risk for violence examining the campus, reviewing crime rates and surveying employees about their perceptions of risk.
- Take extra security precautions in the emergency department, especially if the facility is in an area with a high crime rate or gang activity. Precautions might include uniformed security guards, scanning people entering the building for weapons and inspecting bags.
- Conduct thorough background checks of prospective employees and staff.
- Report crime to law enforcement.

"Health care facilities should be places of healing, not harm. But, unfortunately, health care settings are not immune from the types of violence that are found in the other areas of our lives," says Mark R. Chassin, M.D., M.P.P., M.P.H., president, The Joint Commission. "The

recommendations in this *Alert* give health care institutions and caregivers specific strategies to take action that will keep everyone safer.”

In addition to the specific recommendations contained in the *Alert*, The Joint Commission urges hospitals to comply with the requirements described in its accreditation standards to prevent violence. The standards require accredited health care facilities to have a security plan as well as conduct violence risk assessments, develop strategies to prevent violence and have a response plan when a violent episode occurs. The Joint Commission’s standards also are clear that patients have a right to be free from neglect, exploitation, and verbal, mental, physical and sexual abuse.

The warning about violence in health care facilities is part of a series of *Alerts* issued by The Joint Commission. Much of the information and guidance provided in these *Alerts* is drawn from The Joint Commission’s Sentinel Event Database, one of the nation’s most comprehensive voluntary reporting systems for serious adverse events in health care. The database includes detailed information about both adverse events and their underlying causes. Previous *Alerts* have addressed maternal deaths, health care technology, anticoagulants, wrong-site surgery, medication mix-ups, health care-associated infections, and patient suicides, among others. The complete list and text of past issues of *Sentinel Event Alert* can be found on The Joint Commission Web site at www.jointcommission.org.

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Founded in 1951, The Joint Commission seeks to continuously improve health care for the public, in collaboration with other stakeholders, by evaluating health care organizations and inspiring them to excel in providing safe and effective care of the highest quality and value. The Joint Commission evaluates and accredits more than 17,000 health care organizations and programs in the United States, including more than 9,500 hospitals and home care organizations, and more than 6,300 other health care organizations that provide long term care, behavioral health care, laboratory and ambulatory care services. In addition, The Joint Commission also provides certification of more than 1,000 disease-specific care programs, primary stroke centers, and health care staffing services. An independent, not-for-profit organization, The Joint Commission is the nation’s oldest and largest standards-setting and accrediting body in health care. Learn more about The Joint Commission at www.jointcommission.org.