

CASE STUDY

Empowering Providers to Prevent Workplace Violence



Torrance Memorial has seen preliminary results showing a **57% reduction** in ED utilization.

“There are a lot of workplace threats taking place that are alarming. I think a lot of us in medicine have begun to feel a little beat down—and have adopted the attitude that behaviors we wouldn’t tolerate in normal society are okay in the ED, including verbal and physical abuse. Taking care of patients has become a dangerous job, and it’s not supposed to be...”

- David Presser, MD
Emergency Medicine at
Torrance Memorial Medical
Center

Torrance Memorial Medical Center

Working in the emergency department (ED), physicians and staff are at the frontlines of the hospital. Knowing how best to address those that walk through hospital doors—especially complex patients who have a history of violence, substance use disorder, chronic pain, or mental illness—can be near impossible without a clear understanding of patient history.

The Challenge: Finding an empathetic but safe approach to patient care

When it comes to emergency medicine, providers face the difficult balance between giving the patient the benefit of the doubt, without being naive. Prescribing opioids to a patient with chronic pain, assessing mental illness, and treating patients with a history of violence or abuse all require providers to be both empathetic and safe as they determine the best plan of care for these patients.

For providers at Torrance Memorial Medical Center (Torrance Memorial), a 512-bed, nonprofit medical center in southern California, the key to finding this balance started with a more informed picture of the patients who were walking through the ED doors.

An interdisciplinary team of case managers, social workers, lead nurses, and physicians met regularly to discuss the needs of vulnerable, complex patients who were in a period of high ED utilization.

Together, these interdisciplinary teams worked to determine unified care plans that met the unique needs of these individual patients and stored these care plans in the Collective Platform. With the platform, care plans could be set up to pop-up automatically within provider workflows, helping the attending physician instantly know key patient information and determine the best steps moving forward.

So far, this has not only been instrumental in helping providers prescribe opioids and

other drugs from a point of strength but has increased provider competence and confidence when treating those with a history of violence or aggression.

The Solution: Communicating problems early-on for better patient outcomes

With the Collective Platform, staff at Torrance Memorial are able to flag patients with a potential for violent behavior and alert security personnel as soon as these patients present at the ED. The patient is moved to an isolated area where security can screen the patient for any weapons or other items that may harm the patient, staff, or others at the hospital.

Once the patient has been cleared, security escorts the individual to his or her examination with the physician and nurse. The patient may then, if necessary, be escorted off the property at the end of the visit.

In addition, patients who have a history of violence may be asked to enter into a behavioral contract, outlining appropriate and inappropriate behavior—including threats of violence or intimidation against providers—before beginning treatment. These behavioral contracts are signed by the patient and uploaded into the Collective Platform for future use.

Having clear expectations upfront between the providers and patients has helped deescalate potentially abusive situations, which leads to smoother patient visits, happier staff, and less disruption in care. Dr. Presser at Torrance Memorial shares:

“The staff at Torrance are a ragtag band of motivated and excited individuals who want to provide the best care for our patients. In improving patient safety, we’re ensuring that we have control of the clinical environment—and doing right by the patient in the process.”

This proactive approach to identify potential threats or complications early on has not only impacted the overall workplace safety, but improved patient outcomes as well.

Patient Anecdotes

Dr. Presser shares one example of the importance real-time information plays in preventing workplace violence.

“We were working with one patient who had some issues with chronic pain, which meant he was frequently visiting the ED. He had repeatedly made some fairly aggressive and menacing threats, and a committee was organized to establish protocol for addressing this patient. Now, our director of security receives alerts whenever the patient registers and accompanies him throughout his visit. The patient has a behavioral contract which he agrees to abide by, and this has helped our visits go more smoothly and minimized disruption for our other patients as well.”

Preliminary Outcomes

Torrance Memorial's focus on collaborative care plans for complex patients—combined with Collective's real-time notifications—has empowered Torrance Memorial providers with the information they need to confidently treat and care for their patients and lower ED utilization—with preliminary results showing a 57 percent reduction in ED utilization.

Perhaps most importantly, this initiative has proved that informed providers are empowered providers—and reinforced the value of receiving patient information through more collaborated care. Dr. Presser explains:

“Knowing the plan beforehand has given our providers the confidence beforehand to know that they can handle these situations with violent patients if they arise and helped us feel like we have control over the safety of our environment. But it has also helped us work from our points of strengths. With patient info readily accessible, we can prescribe medications and treatments from a point of knowledge, better transition patients to appropriate outpatient care settings, and look at the patient health holistically for overall better outcomes.”