

### Protecting healthcare workers from violent attacks

Healthcare workers are increasingly the targets of violent attacks from patients who are on drugs or otherwise altered, from patients' families and friends, and from random strangers. This epidemic of violence against caregivers is concerning and it doesn't begin and end in hospitals or at the scene of an accident. Healthcare workers visiting patients in their own homes face significant risk of an unwanted situation and must be protected as much as possible, according to Wavelink.

Alan Stocker, health practice lead, Wavelink, said, "It's increasingly common for patients to receive home visits from health professionals, including nurses, allied health professionals, and community caregivers. This is a positive initiative for patients who may find it difficult to travel. However, with verbal and physical attacks on the rise, there are fewer protections for these health professionals when they're in someone else's home compared with being in a hospital setting."

Hospitals are generally well-equipped to manage staff safety with duress buttons and onsite security. Some hospitals even provide a mobile duress tag that staff can wear to sound the alarm if they're attacked. These mobile duress tags show the staff member's location in the hospital so help can find them sooner.

However, in a patient's home, these methods are generally unavailable. Therefore, it's up to the healthcare organisations and individuals involved to ensure they're being as safe as possible when making home visits. At a minimum, this should include:

- a system to monitor visits and ensure staff return safely even after hours and on weekends
- a procedure for contacting police in an emergency
- mobile phones and personal duress alarms for every worker.

Alan Stocker said, "There is a critical need to protect any caregiver that is at risk from occupational violence, particularly when not on a hospital campus where security personnel may not be on hand to render immediate assistance. While the basic guidelines are better than nothing, a more comprehensive staff safety solution is essential."

Wavelink has identified seven key characteristics of a strong staff safety solution:

- 1. Dedicated.** The ability to initiate staff duress inside and outside a hospital through a purpose-built smartphone with a dedicated alarm button.
- 2. Automatic.** An automatically-activated alarm if the device is not moving, or detected running or lying flat (man down) for pre-programmed time periods.
- 3. Smart.** Automatic security notifications while inside the hospital, or police notifications if outside the hospital, without having to make a single phone call.
- 4. Informative.** Live-streaming of video and audio from the device, automatically triggered, to let first responders assess the situation remotely.
- 5. Discreet.** A smartphone that makes the screen blank once duress has been activated so as not to alert the aggressor that duress has been activated, while keeping the caregiver informed that help is on the way via low-intensity vibrations.
- 6. Accurate.** The ability to locate the device both within and outside a hospital or building.
- 7. Reliable.** The ability to escalate the alarm if notified first responders don't acknowledge it.

Wavelink's staff safety solution is based on its [Spectralink Versity](#) clinical smartphone handsets, which also offer additional clinical functionalities to make it easier for caregivers to provide high quality healthcare. The staff safety solution is currently being trialled at public health facilities around Australia.