



## **Testimony by Brandy Welch at the GAO hearing on workplace violence Washington DC 4/14/16**

Good afternoon, my name is Brandy Welch, I have worked for 16 years as a registered nurse at a large hospital in Long Beach California.

Because I work with children, I used to think that workplace violence was something that couldn't happen to me.

That all changed this past October. I was assigned to a developmentally delayed 14 year old patient with a diagnosis of aggressive behavior. The patient had a sitter at his bedside, and at about 10:00 am, the sitter called out for help.

When I entered the room, the patient had his mother pressed against the closet door with his hands around her neck. I immediately called for security and additional staff. A second nurse arrived, and together we attempted to calm the patient down and redirect his behavior.

Luckily, we were able to safely remove the patient's mother from the situation. However, as she was leaving the room, the patient began throwing any objects he could get his hands on. As quickly as I could, I tried to remove anything that the patient could grab and throw. I saw that there was a chair nearby, and I tried to move it away from the patient, but he was quicker than me and got to the chair first.

The patient picked up a chair and threw it directly at me. I was trapped between a wall and a bed, with no clear exit route. I knew that the sitter and the patient's mother were directly behind me. If I ducked, they would surely be hit. In the heat of the moment, my first reaction was to reach up to stop the chair with my right hand.

All of this happened in a span of a few minutes. But the fallout of this incident is still with me today. I currently suffer from tendonitis in my right elbow, which makes it difficult to do simple everyday tasks like walking my dog, typing, and hanging bags of fluids at work.

After this incident, I no longer feel safe at work. This injury has completely changed my perspective of the word 'violence.' I never expected to be injured at work by a patient, for I work with children. But now I have an injury that will chase me my entire career and after retirement.

Workplace violence should not be part of the job, and it doesn't have to be. Workplace violence prevention standards, like the upcoming regulations in California, require employers to identify risk factors and implement engineering controls to correct them. In a room where patients with aggressive behavior will be located, this might include affixing large furniture to the floor so that it

can't be used as a weapon. These standards will also require training for employees, so that we know how to handle aggressive behavior, deescalate violence, and avoid physical harm.

California's standards also require workplace violence prevention plans to include input from employees. In the children's hospital where I work, sometimes the only option available to us is to put restraints on the patients, which can increase behavioral issues and traumatize patients. Healthcare workers can speak to these concerns and help develop protocols that protect workers without jeopardizing patient health.

I am so proud that the work of my union—National Nurses United—has resulted in strong workplace violence standards for healthcare workers in California. But it is not enough. It is time for a strong national standard to protect *all* employees from workplace violence. We need to guarantee that workplace violence is not a “part of the job,” but that prevention is.