

A Cup of Scalding Tea

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Sheila Wilson R.N.BSN MPH
President, Stop Healthcare Violence

A Brooklyn hospital nurse suffered second-degree burns last month when a patient's daughter threw scalding tea in her face.

Nineteen-year-old Milldred Alvarez attacked the Brooklyn healthcare worker at Wyckoff Heights Medical Center, where Alvarez's mother was being treated.

In a June 17, 2016 *New York Post* article, reporter Sarah Trefethen wrote that Alvarez was "unhappy with the care her mother received." The attack left the nurse with pain and blisters on her forehead, and Alvarez was subsequently charged with felony assault.

The victim developed blisters as a result of the assault, meaning she received a second degree burn.

A Recognized Hazard

Here's the thing: ***Workplace violence is a recognized hazard in the healthcare industry.***

In 2010 the Bureau of labor Statistics (BLS) reported that healthcare and social assistance workers were victims of approximately 11,370 assaults by persons; an increase of ***more than 13%*** over the number of such assaults reported the previous year.

Having established that ***workplace violence is a recognized hazard in the healthcare industry***, with data supporting this tenet, ***why is it still continuing?***
And more to the point, ***why is it worsening?***

Stiffer Penalties are Paramount

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Source: <http://nypost.com/2016/06/17/pissed-off-patient-throws-scalding-tea-in-nurses-face/>

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Thirty-three states have passed legislation making assault on healthcare workers a felony. As someone who has been tirelessly lobbying my own state of Massachusetts to pass such legislation, I fervently applaud those 33 states and the advocates who have worked to make it happen. It should be said, however, that while stricter penalties are paramount, it's only the tip of the iceberg. Many more layers and elements must be addressed in order to combat this ongoing and increasing epidemic, and all of the players need to be on the same page.

But felony law is a strong start.

A strong start toward stopping the flood of violence our healthcare workers are facing each and every day.

What if It Were You?

I am living and working in a state that punishes assault on healthcare workers as a misdemeanor; meaning the perpetrator gets nothing more than a slap on the hand, administration rarely supports the victim, and nothing ever comes out of the assault.

But close your eyes for a moment and imagine: What if the individual who suffered a faceful of scalding tea were your mother, your sister or your brother? Your son or daughter? And she, or he, is left with painful second-degree facial burns, while Ms. Alvarez is charged only with a misdemeanor. The incident is quickly forgotten, as if it never happened at all – except for the victim, who is left with physical and emotional scars and post-trauma stress. Would you not yearn for a stringent penalty on behalf of your family member? A strong law that would serve as a deterrent to others like Mildred Alvarez?

I know I would.