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Introduction

The rise in violence within Pittsburgh's healthcare facilities necessitates immediate attention to security measures. Recent incidents, such as the assault on staff at Jefferson Hospital, highlight the urgency of addressing this issue. [CBS News+1post-gazette.com+1](#)

The Emergency Nurses Association reports 70% of its members report being hit or kicked on the job. These numbers do not even include the volume of verbal abuse and direct threats made against those providing care. The rising threats necessitate a comprehensive security strategy.

Healthcare institutions must consider their approach to physical security—whether to build an in-house team or outsource security services to specialists like PalAmerican Security.

This guide will explore the pros and cons of both models and how PalAmerican mitigates the traditional drawbacks of outsourcing.

Understanding the Threat: Violence in Healthcare

Hospitals are no longer the sanctuaries of peace they once were. From patient-on-staff aggression to external threats, healthcare workers face an increasing risk of harm. A study by the American College of Emergency Physicians found that 80% of physicians believe that violence in emergency departments negatively impacts patient care.

The International Association for Healthcare Security and Safety Foundation (IAHSSF) reported that the assault rates against healthcare workers post-pandemic have reached 17.7 per 100 beds.

Healthcare workers in Pittsburgh face increasing risks of workplace violence. A 2022 survey revealed that 66% of Pennsylvania nurses and healthcare professionals experienced workplace violence, with 72% feeling their hospitals did not adequately protect them.

As the statistics above illustrate, the US healthcare sector faces a serious and growing issue with violence towards its employees. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 73% of nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses with days away from work due to violence in the US occur in a healthcare setting. Although this percentage is eye-catchingly high, it is widely accepted that violent incidents in our healthcare facilities are under-reported and under-recorded. The true scale of the problem is even greater than the statistics suggest.



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73%

of nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses with days away from work due to violence in the US occur in a healthcare setting.

The Impact of Hospital Violence on Nurse and Doctor Retention

It is not overdramatizing the problem to state that workplace violence threatens the health of patients, healthcare providers, and healthcare workers. Workplace violence (WPV) in hospitals does more than pose an immediate physical risk—there is a direct impact on patient care.

Violence creates a lasting psychological and emotional toll on healthcare professionals, leading to increased burnout, job dissatisfaction, and higher turnover rates. Nurses and doctors facing constant exposure to violence—whether from patients, family members, or even colleagues—experience heightened stress levels, anxiety, and a loss of motivation, all of which can drive them out of the profession. A healthcare setting is where you need employees to be at their best, both physically and mentally. The departure of skilled medical professionals due to safety concerns not only disrupts hospital operations but can also significantly affect the quality of care delivered. Just one incident can have significant consequences.

In Pittsburgh, 43% of hospital workers who quit cited violence or verbal abuse from patients as a primary reason. wesa.fm



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43%

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Key Ways Hospital Violence Affects Retention

- 1 Psychological Impact**
Experiencing or fearing violence can trigger anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and decreased self-esteem, all of which contribute to reduced job satisfaction and motivation to stay in the field.
- 2 Burnout and Stress**
The constant fear of workplace violence exacerbates stress and burnout, further accelerating the decision to leave healthcare roles.
- 3 Decreased Job Satisfaction**
Feeling unsafe or unsupported by hospital administration leads to dissatisfaction, increasing the likelihood that clinical care providers and other employees will seek work elsewhere.
- 4 Impact on Quality of Care**
High turnover rates disrupt teamwork, reduce consistency in patient care, and burden remaining staff with increased workloads, which can ultimately harm patient outcomes.
- 5 Perception of the Profession**
Ongoing reports of violence deter prospective healthcare workers from entering the field, compounding existing staffing shortages.



Factors That Influence the Impact of Violence on Retention

- 1 Most Violence in Healthcare is Patient-Generated**
The prevalence of violence (92%+) in hospitals stems from patients and visitors, each presenting unique challenges and consequences for those affected.
- 2 Organizational Support**
Hospitals that implement strong policies, procedures, and safe practices to address violence, including clear reporting mechanisms and employee support programs, can help mitigate its effects.
- 3 Culture of Safety**
A culture that normalizes aggressive behavior or fails to act on safety concerns can worsen retention issues and discourage new talent from joining the profession.

The Impact of Hospital Violence on a Day in the Life of a Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) and Hospital Chief Operating Officer (COO)

For healthcare executives like Chief Nursing Officers (CNOs) and Chief Operating Officers (COOs), each day is a balancing act between increasing staff and patient safety, managing regulatory compliance, and maintaining operational efficiency. They are deeply concerned about the fear of violence, staff burnout, and the impact of security threats on patient satisfaction scores. The challenge of securing a hospital environment while preserving a welcoming, healing atmosphere is a persistent concern. With staff shortages stretching resources thin and incidents of violence rising, the decision between insourcing security or outsourcing to specialists is critical.

Healthcare executives must recognize that creating a safe workplace is not only a legal and ethical responsibility but also a critical factor in maintaining a stable, skilled, and engaged workforce. Hospitals that take proactive steps to improve security—through specialized training, strategic staffing, and professional security partnerships—can significantly reduce violence-related turnover and create a safer, more supportive environment for healthcare workers.



In-House Security Teams: Pros and Cons

Hospitals that opt to build their own security teams gain direct oversight and integration within their existing operations. While this approach allows for highly customized security measures, it also requires significant investment in hiring, training, and maintaining a dedicated workforce. Understanding the benefits and challenges of in-house security can help hospital administrators determine whether this model aligns with their needs.

| Pros



Greater Control

Hospitals have full authority over security protocols and operations, allowing for customization to their unique needs.



Deep Institutional Knowledge

In-house staff develop an intimate understanding of hospital layouts, patient flows, and potential security vulnerabilities.



Immediate Response

Security teams are always on-site, reducing response times to critical incidents.



Cultural Integration

The security team becomes an integral part of the hospital's culture, aligning with its mission and values.

| Cons



High Costs

Salaries, benefits, training, and operational expenses require significant investment.



Staffing Challenges

Recruiting, training, and retaining specialized security personnel is resource-intensive.



Scalability Issues

Adjusting security coverage for fluctuating patient volumes, emerging threats, and organizational expansion can be challenging.



Potential Inconsistencies

The quality of security can vary depending on individual staff performance and internal resource constraints.

Outsourcing Security: Pros and Cons

For many hospitals, outsourcing security services provides a cost-effective and scalable solution. Partnering with a specialized security provider offers access to highly trained personnel and advanced monitoring capabilities. However, outsourcing also introduces challenges related to control and integration. Weighing these factors is crucial in selecting a security model that promotes safety without compromising operational efficiency.

Pros



Cost-Effectiveness

Outsourced security eliminates the direct overhead costs associated with maintaining an internal security team.



Specialized Expertise

Access to highly trained professionals with experience in de-escalation, access control, and healthcare security.



Scalability

Security presence can be adjusted quickly to meet changing demands and scope.



24/7 Monitoring

Many security providers, like PalAmerican, offer remote surveillance and rapid response services.

Traditional Cons



Less Direct Control

Hospitals may have less influence over outsourced security operations.



Potential Communication Barriers

Gaps between hospital staff and security providers can impact efficiency.



Lack of Familiarity with the Facility

Outsourced personnel may not have deep knowledge of hospital-specific risks.



Vendor Dependency

Hospitals must rely on the security provider to maintain high-quality service standards.

The PalAmerican Advantage: Overcoming the Challenges of Outsourcing

PalAmerican Security takes a unique approach to healthcare security, where hospitals receive the benefits of outsourcing without the drawbacks. Here's how:

1. Tailored Security Solutions

Unlike a one-size-fits-all model, PalAmerican provides customized security programs that integrate seamlessly with hospital operations. Their security officers are trained in:

- De-escalation techniques** to manage aggressive patients.
- Emergency response protocols** to handle critical situations.
- Patient safety procedures** to protect both staff and visitors.

2. Hospital-Specific Training

PalAmerican security personnel undergo comprehensive healthcare-specific training, including:

- MOAB® (Management of Aggressive Behavior)**
- CPR & First Aid Certification**
- ASHER (Active Shooter Hostile Event Response) Training**
- HIPAA Compliance Awareness**
- Customer Service Excellence**

This level of preparation allows officers to function as an extension of the hospital's team, not just an external service.

3. Local Presence with National Resources

PalAmerican provides the best of both worlds:

- A strong local presence** increases responsiveness and hands-on management.
- National resources** allow for enhanced technology integration, large-scale training programs, and industry-leading expertise.

4. Seamless Communication & Integration

PalAmerican implements **dedicated healthcare security management teams** to bridge communication gaps.

Security officers are embedded in hospital workflows, attending staff briefings and participating in cross-functional emergency drills.

Advanced **incident documentation and reporting systems** provide real-time data to hospital administrators.

5. Scalable & Cost-Effective Security

Hospitals can **scale** security services based on patient volume and emerging threats.

Flexible staffing models allow facilities to increase or decrease security presence as needed.

Eliminates the **long-term financial burdens** of maintaining an internal security workforce.

Patient Watch Services: A Critical Need in Healthcare

Why Patient Watch is Challenging for In-House Teams

Hospitals universally dislike managing patient watch programs, but for PalAmerican, it's a core competency.

Specialized patient safety staff are a cost-effective alternative to nurses, allowing hospitals to allocate expensive medical resources more efficiently.

Patient watch requires 24/7, 1:1 observation, especially for high-risk patients (suicidal, aggressive, or mentally unstable individuals).

Liability and compliance risks make hospitals reluctant to handle patient watch internally.

Nurses and medical staff shortages make it impractical for hospitals to dedicate LPNs or RNs to sitter roles.

PalAmerican's Expertise in Patient Watch

Even if a hospital chooses to maintain an in-house security team, PalAmerican can substitute patient watch services to alleviate staffing and liability concerns.

Highly trained specialized sitters provide continuous patient monitoring and risk mitigation.

Reduces strain on nurses and medical staff, allowing them to focus on primary patient care.

Provides a non-threatening presence to de-escalate volatile situations without clinical intervention.

Meets regulatory compliance requirements while protecting patients, staff, and visitors.

Patient watch extends beyond the ER into surgery recovery units, ICUs, and psychiatric care, where close observation is mandatory. Hospitals using PalAmerican for patient watch improve safety outcomes while cutting costs.

Cost Analysis of In-House vs. Outsourcing Physical Security Teams in Healthcare

When comparing the cost of an in-house physical security team versus outsourcing for a hospital, outsourcing generally appears more cost-effective due to reduced overhead costs like recruitment, training, benefits, and equipment maintenance, while still allowing access to specialized security expertise and scalability based on need. However, the exact cost comparison depends heavily on the hospital's size, security requirements, and the specific outsourcing provider's pricing structure.

Key Factors to Consider in the Cost Analysis

In-House Security Team Costs

- 1 Personnel**
Salaries and benefits for security officers, supervisors, and security managers.
- 2 Recruitment and Training**
Costs associated with hiring, background checks, initial training, and ongoing education.
- 3 Equipment**
Purchase and maintenance of security cameras, access control systems, uniforms, and communication devices.
- 4 Overtime**
Extra costs for overtime shifts due to staff shortages or unexpected absences and emerging events.
- 5 Administrative Overhead**
Hiring and payroll processing, scheduling, training, and compliance management.
- 6 Risk Management**
Direct exposure to all potential liabilities arising from security breaches or incidents.

Outsourcing Security Team Costs

- 1 Contract Fees**
Fixed monthly or hourly rates based on the number of healthcare security staff required and service-level agreements.
- 2 Specialized Services**
Additional costs for specialized security services like defensive equipment, canine units, mobile patrols, or patient watch.
- 3 Technology Costs**
Access to advanced security technology and monitoring systems provided by the outsourcing company.

Potential Advantages of Outsourcing

Reduced Labor Costs – Outsourcing companies leverage economies of scale, offering lower per-guard costs.

Scalability – The Ability to adjust the number of guards based on patient volume or special events without needing to hire or lay off staff.

Expertise and Training – Access to specialized security personnel with healthcare-specific training.

Reduced Administrative Burden – Outsourcing company handles recruitment, training, scheduling, and payroll.

Risk Management – reduce the direct financial burden with protection and Indemnification from potential security-related liabilities.

Focus on Core Services – by outsourcing security, hospitals can focus more on their primary healthcare services

Potential Drawbacks of Outsourcing

Less Control – Hospitals may have less direct control over security procedures and staff performance.

Potential for Quality Variation – There is a Reliance on the outsourcing company to maintain consistent service quality.

Communication Challenges – Potential gaps between hospital staff and outsourced security staff.

Key Considerations Before Deciding

Hospital Size and Security Needs – Larger hospitals with complex security requirements may benefit more from an in-house team with customized security strategies.

Budget Constraints – Evaluate the cost-effectiveness of each option based on the hospital's budget and financial risk tolerance.

Local Security Landscape – Consider the crime rate and specific security challenges in the area when choosing a security provider.

The following table provides a cost comparison between in-house and outsourced security services:

Cost Comparison: In-House vs. Outsourced Security

COST FACTOR	IN-HOUSE SECURITY COSTS	OUTSOURCED SECURITY COSTS
Personnel (Salaries & Benefits)	\$1M+ per year	Included in contract
Recruitment & Training	\$250K+	Included in contract
Equipment (Cameras, Uniforms, Communication Devices)	\$500K+ initial, \$50K+ annually	Included in contract
Overtime Costs	High, due to absences and roster vacancies	Included in contract unless scope added
Administrative Overhead	High, includes payroll, training, & compliance	Minimal
Contract Fees	N/A	\$500K+ per year
Specialized Services	High, due to need to acquire talent to perform	Varies
Technology Costs	\$50K+	Included in contract





Conclusion: Strengthening Security in Pittsburgh Hospitals

Hospital security is a critical concern in Pittsburgh, where rising violence threatens staff safety and patient care. Healthcare administrators must prioritize effective security solutions to combat workplace violence, reduce staff burnout, and maintain operational efficiency.

PalAmerican Security is the undisputed leader in healthcare security, offering unmatched expertise and tailored solutions that meet the unique needs of hospitals and medical facilities. With over 500 healthcare facilities secured across North America, our programs are built on industry-leading best practices that enhance safety, improve patient experiences, and relieve the administrative burden from hospital executives.

PalAmerican Security provides tailored security programs that integrate seamlessly into hospital operations. With expertise in de-escalation, patient safety, and emergency response, PalAmerican offers:

- Professionally trained healthcare security officers
- High-risk patient watch services
- Emergency department staffing for violence prevention
- Workplace violence prevention and management training
- Security consulting, risk assessments, and technology solutions

By choosing PalAmerican, Pittsburgh hospitals can ensure a safer environment for both staff and patients. Whether supplementing in-house teams or fully outsourcing security, PalAmerican delivers proven, cost-effective solutions tailored to the city's unique challenges.

Now is the time to take a proactive approach to healthcare security. Contact PalAmerican to discuss how our customized security services can protect your hospital, staff, and patients.

Relevant News Story

A recent incident underscores the urgency of addressing healthcare violence in Pittsburgh. An 18-year-old man was charged with assaulting nurses and a police officer at Jefferson Hospital, highlighting the critical need for effective security measures. [post-gazette.com+1CBS News+1](https://www.post-gazette.com+1CBS+News+1)

By proactively addressing these challenges, Pittsburgh's healthcare facilities can create safer environments for both staff and patients.

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