

28 February 2024

Attacks on Staff and Patients

In 2018 you released figures below

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/news/over-6000-nurses-attacked-work-2018>

3950 attacks on nurses
29 attacks on doctors
34 attacks on other HSC staff

Note: In answering this request for information, Belfast Trust would point out that the article referred to above was not authored by Belfast Trust but rather was authored and published by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). Belfast Trust simply provided figures to be included in the article and any specific queries concerning the content of the article should be addressed direct with DHSSPS.

1. What is an “attack”?

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (the Trust) would not use the term ‘attack’. It appears this is a definition from the author of the DHSSPS document - not a Trust definition.

The Trust refer to a ‘Zero Tolerance’ approach to the prevention and management of Aggression and Violence towards staff in the workplace.

The Trust would consider an ‘attack’ to hold the same definition as abuse within the terms of the Zero Tolerance Policy - “*Workplace violence and aggression includes any incident in which an employee is verbally or physically abused, threatened or assaulted by a service user, visitor, colleague or member of the public in circumstances arising out of his or her employment, whether they are on or off duty*”. For information, the Zero Tolerance Policy is attached as a separate document – Attachment 1.

You will note that some staff details have been redacted from the policies provided, as this information is exempt under Section 40(2) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 – Personal information relating to a third party. This is deemed to be personal information about another individual and disclosure would breach one or more of the principles of the Data Protection Act.

It is the protocol of Belfast Trust to make public names of employees of a senior standing – Band 8A and above. Those who fall below that band are exempt and so their names have been redacted.

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2. What are the figures for years 2014-2017 and 2019- 2023?

The response provided in 2018 was based on the following parameters:

- Incidents reported within Trust hospital sites only (not Community).
- Incidents recorded under Physical abuse, assault or violence to staff.

The same/equivalent parameters have been used to produce the figures below:

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Staff - Nursing/ Midwifery	1415	1922	2544	2628	3213	2449	2961	2259	1754
Staff - Medical	22	17	20	18	33	16	29	19	26
Other Staff	103	122	171	131	238	182	156	133	147

3. Are any of these incidents as a result of the illness of a patient? If so, how many?

We do not collate information in a manner that would allow this information to be supplied without scrutinising individual patient records, which would require more than 18 hours?

Belfast Trust considers that the cost of retrieving the information would be above the 'Appropriate Limit', as defined by the Freedom of Information Act under Section 12. Section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act makes provision for public authorities to refuse requests for information where the cost of dealing with them would exceed the appropriate limit. The limit has been specified as £450 for public authorities such as Belfast Trust. This represents the cost of one or more persons spending 18 hours in determining whether we hold the information, locating, retrieving and extracting this information.

3a. Why are incidents involving the symptoms of an illness considered an attack and physical abuse?

As per our response to Question 1, the Trust would not use the term 'attack' and considers these terms to be synonyms in the context of a 'Zero Tolerance' approach.

Staff dealing with vulnerable patients are trained in the Management of Actual and Perceived Aggression.

4. Are any of these incidents as a result of unacceptable behaviour? If so, how many?

Belfast Trust considers all acts of verbal and physical aggression to be unacceptable. However, we recognise that incidents resulting from symptoms of illness occur. This is understandable, and consideration is given to the unique needs of individuals in our care.

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The Trust does not collate information in a manner that would allow numbers to be supplied without scrutinising individual patient records, which would require more than 18 hours work? Again the Trust considers that the cost of retrieving the information would be above the 'Appropriate Limit'.

5. Are any of these incidents as a result of the patient having a severe learning disability (not an illness)? If so, how many?

Belfast Trust do not collate information in a manner that would allow this information to be supplied without scrutinising individual patient records, which would require more than 18 hours work. Belfast Trust considers that the cost of retrieving the information would be above the 'Appropriate Limit', as defined by the Freedom of Information Act under Section 12.

6. How does the Belfast Trust investigate that an employee has been subjected to an incident of physical abuse or an attack by a patient with:

- **Severe Learning Disability**
- **Dementia**
- **Mental Health condition**

Belfast Trust investigates incidents via the Procedure for Reporting and Managing Adverse Incidents and recognises the rights of individual members of staff to report an incident to PSNI and pursue legal action against an aggressor in the context of their work, where they believe that they have been a victim of physical abuse or an attack.

a. Does the Belfast Trust interview or meet with vulnerable and relatives during the investigation?

All reported incidents should be managed within the context of the Trust Procedure for Reporting and Managing Adverse Incidents.

When a staff member seeks legal intervention, where they have been a victim of physical abuse, this is a matter for PSNI.

7. If a patient in Muckamore Abbey Hospital or Knockbracken pushes or punches a staff member, is this considered an attack and an incident of physical abuse?

The Trust adverse incident definition is as follows:

"Any event or circumstance that could have or did lead to harm, loss or damage to people, property or environment or reputation arising during the course of the business of an HSC organisation / special agency or commissioned service".

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Therefore, if the event stated above meets this criteria it would be expected that the staff involved would record this on the Datix system as an incident of physical abuse towards staff.

As per Question 1, the Trust would consider an 'attack' to hold the same definition as abuse within the terms of the Zero Tolerance Policy - "*Workplace violence and aggression includes any incident in which an employee is verbally or physically abused, threatened or assaulted by a service user, visitor, colleague or member of the public in circumstances arising out of his or her employment, whether they are on or off duty*".

7a If so, why is it considered an attack?

As per the response at Question 1, Belfast Trust would not use the term 'attack'.

7b Why is it considered physical abuse?

See responses to questions 1 and 7 above.

8. Release to me your policy for investigating an allegation from an employee that they have been attacked

The Adverse Incident Reporting and Management Policy is attached as a separate document – Attachment 2.

9. How many vulnerable adults in the care of Belfast Trust have been subject to an attack or physical abuse since 2016? (Do not provide figures for allegations, I would like actual incidents of abuse like the confirmed incidents of abuse of employees)

We do not collate information in a manner that would allow this information to be supplied without scrutinising individual patient records, which would require more than 18 hours work. The incident system does not collate information regarding the affected person's vulnerability.

Belfast Trust considers that the cost of retrieving the information would be above the 'Appropriate Limit', as defined by the Freedom of Information Act under Section 12.

10. When a staff member reports that they have been subjected to an incident of physical abuse or an attack, are they automatically believed without investigation and the allegation reported as a confirmed incident?

Yes, with subsequent application of the Zero Tolerance policy and Procedure for Reporting and Managing Adverse Incidents.

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10a When a vulnerable adult reports that they have been subjected to an incident of physical abuse or an attack, are they automatically believed without investigation and the allegation reported as a confirmed incident?

Yes. The incident is reported to Adult Safeguarding and investigated in line with the Trust Adult Safeguarding Policy and Procedure.