

Amid escalating gun violence, consider tech, environment fixes to boost safety

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A rash of gun violence around the nation, including a June 1 shooting at the St. Francis Hospital campus in Tulsa, is a cue to consider security upgrades to protect your practice and patients.

The Tulsa patient who killed four people, including the doctor who was treating him, before committing suicide had no trouble entering the premises without official clearance. He entered via the parking garage, the kind of security shortfall that Celina Burns, chief commercial officer at the IntelliCentrics credentialing and security firm in Flower Mound, Texas, believes will be less acceptable to administrators in the days ahead.

"There can be hundreds of people walking the hallways of a hospital at any given moment, including [besides patients and providers] vendors, such as representatives of pharmaceutical and medical device companies," Burns says.

While you may not want to make big changes based on the threat of intruder violence, you should consider, along with your normal concern for the people in your office, your responsibilities under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OSHA) and your exposure to legal liability in the event of an attack ([PBN 7/19/21](#)).

According to Gene Petrino, a security consultant and co-founder of Survival Response LLC in Coral Springs, Fla., a typical security reassessment would include an evaluation of the physical practice environment and may call for new design elements to enhance safety, such as lighting that makes it easier for both staff and security cameras to see what's going on in what would otherwise be dead spots.

You might also want to consider having certain areas, such as the front desk, behind protective glass. While "bullet-resistant glass is expensive, bullet-resistant film is much more affordable and can be easily installed," Petrino says. You also could have a more secure door built for the passageway from the waiting room to the exam rooms.

You may want to consider other security measures as well, such as access control systems, security guards or metal detectors, with an eye toward deterrence. Petrino mentions the "Pathways to Violence" analysis by researchers Frederick Calhoun and Steve Weston, which shows assailants usually go through "research and planning" and "probing" phases, in which they consider the likelihood that their attack would succeed, before committing to action (*see resource, below*).

"The shooter in Tulsa knew that there wasn't anything stopping him," Petrino says. "But in other circumstances, if someone says, 'I can't get past that door, this is going to be hard to do,' that's going to reduce their chances."

Petrino thinks employee training is of limited use and often just serves as a crutch. "There are a lot of administrators in health care who claim safety as a priority, but when it comes to taking action, they just check boxes: 'We did our training,'" he says. But Petrino acknowledges the importance of policies and procedures and an action plan so that staff know what they're expected to do in the event of an incident ([PBN 5/18/15](#)).

Track your visitors

You might also consider elevating your awareness of who's in your facility — and who's not supposed to be there. Burns' company offers a digital badge system that allows clients to issue visitors a more technologically advanced version of the usual sticker or lanyard — one that not only tracks the movements of visitors within the space, but also alerts security if the visitor is going where they're not permitted.

This applies not only to staff, physicians and patients, but also to vendors and other business visitors. Visitors register their digital credentials and are allowed or denied access based on levels of clearance, time of appointment and similar factors, which may be updated in real time by the facility.

"In the last few weeks, not surprisingly, we've seen a doubling-down on the amount of discussion and investment in security at all points of entry from the C-suite," Burns says.

Burns notes an added advantage of having a fresh security system: "Having a safe environment really has a direct impact on workforce engagement and turnover," she says. "We've all heard the stories about the pandemic patient population, about how some patients are more angry, volatile and in some cases abusive, and how that's contributed directly to turnover. So this doesn't just contribute from a digital security perspective but also relates to workforce engagement and turnover prevention."

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