

To whom it may concern, I work for the Temple Health System in the Psychiatric Emergency Room or as it is known in Philadelphia, "Crisis Center". The Crisis Center is a very dangerous place on a daily basis but the most dangerous situation I have ever witnessed was not in the city but in the quiet farmland of Central Pennsylvania. There is often a misconception that violence only happens in urban areas. Several years ago I had a position as a Mental Health Worker at Philhaven Hospital in Mt. Gretna PA. This is a very rural, free standing psychiatric facility that provides services for the people of Lebanon, Lancaster and Central Pennsylvania. While working there on the adult unit I witnessed the single most violent event of my twelve year career in Mental Health. It was a quiet Saturday on the Unit. Patients were resting and attending relaxation groups as the weekends tended to be more low key with less intensive group sessions and activities. We received a new admission from the local emergency room, which was odd on a weekend due to lower staffing levels and the fact that our beds were usually filled. We received no report of this patient's history of violence from the emergency room and no information that he had illegal drugs in his system, only that he had a change in mental status, was incoherent, mostly somnolent and that he would be sent on an involuntary commitment. This individual appeared to be asleep when he arrived on the unit and was placed in one of our Quiet Rooms. I took his vital signs and he did not wake up. He would not respond to any questions. I informed the nurse and was instructed to return to my normal tasks on the unit. Several minutes later the patient walked out of the quiet room and stood in front of the Nurses Station with eyes closed. We attempted to interact with him but he still remained silent. The Charge Nurse instructed me to go and get him something to eat and drink. I left the area. I obtained the items and began the walk down the long hall to the Nurses Station. As I approached the security doors I saw the patient jumping up and down, surprised I actually laughed to myself believing he was dancing. He was, in fact, stomping on the head of another Mental Health worker who he had just punched in the face, breaking his eye socket and knocking him unconscious. Still behind the security doors I saw one of the Nurses run towards the patient screaming. He instantly turned, punched her once in the face and knocked her unconscious as well. An intern attempted to intervene and the patient struck the intern and chased him down another hallway. I called an emergency code and chased after the patient. This patient had run into a day room where a group activity was taking place. The intern was hiding under a table. The activity therapist was screaming and this patient punched her in the face breaking her nose and knocking her unconscious as well. He then struck a female patient, breaking her nose. I had now been joined by two other Mental Health Workers and we chased the patient out of the dayroom and down another hallway. He was heading for the Older Adult Unit, full of seniors with dementia and those with physical disabilities. When we caught up to him taking him down to the floor. I can only imagine what would have happened if he had assaulted our older patients. As we held him on the floor he asked "can I have something to eat now?" as though nothing had happened. We later found out that this patient was recently released from prison on assault charges and that he was high on PCP. I now deal with individuals on PCP almost every day of my life at the Crisis Center in Philadelphia. Violence is a common occurrence with these individuals and it would be appreciated if it would be recognized as the serious problem that it is. All in all that day at Philhaven, In the span of three minutes, four staff people were put out of work, three of them knocked unconscious, one of which was left with a traumatic brain injury and an innocent patient sustained a broken nose. Violence happens daily at hospitals across the country and must be met with an appropriate response by those who govern the laws of the state.

Sincerely,  
Cody Brown