

The times

Violence Management Special Interest Group

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The first meeting of the Violence Management Special Interest Group on 25 February 1992 drew a mixed group of delegates from three of the 15 Scottish Health Boards, three Regional Social Work Departments and several Education Departments, as well as the Scottish Prison Service. The majority of those who attended were actively engaged in designing training programmes for public sector staff.

This meeting followed on from a conference on Violence in the Public Sector, held at Stirling in 1991. Speakers at the Stirling conference had included nurses, prison staff, social workers and educational psychologists. The meeting demonstrated the interest many groups had in the issue of violence towards staff, and created the impetus to form a group to try to consider the subject further.

At our first meeting in Edinburgh reported here, initial discussion explored similarities between the different disciplines, and revealed much common ground. The problems facing each agency were similar, and included widespread staff acceptance of violence as "part of the job"; under-reporting of violence incidents, and aggression management policies being left up to trainers, rather than being seen as a key management responsibility. There was a lack of research, both into levels of staff assaults and into the efficacy of competing training strategies. Each service reported continuing difficulties with underfunding and understaffing.

Policies on violence were often produced by borrowing guidelines from other available documents, without consulting the local staff who had daily experience of the problem. In some areas this had resulted in staff feeling they had little responsibility for the policy, and leaving it unread on the shelf.

Despite universal concern there were, however, positive examples of good practice to be found. Some

Regional Social Work Departments had ringfenced funds for staff training, and there were examples of encouraging training strategies used in several different types of organisation. One education department had launched a rolling programme to train all residential school staff, from teachers to cleaners, in aggression management techniques. Rather than deciding the task was too large, the organisers had spent time deciding the order in which groups would be called for training, depending largely on the amount of face-to-face contact individuals had with clients. The Prison Service in particular had put considerable effort into educating staff on possible antecedents of violent behaviour, and on ways of defusing dangerous situations.

The group concluded that there was a need for a multi-agency group of this kind, the aims of which should be to:

- promote awareness of the issue
- act as a clearing house for the sharing of resources, research results and experience
- develop strategies for the introduction of effective aggression management policies
- promote research into violence and aggression management
- try to develop an advisory role within agencies.

The group intends to meet quarterly at different Scottish locations. It may serve as a useful model of inter-agency collaboration in an area where much work and effort might otherwise be lost in "rediscovering the wheel".

If interested in further details about the group, please contact Brian Kidd, Department of Psychological Medicine, 1345 Govan Road, Glasgow G51 (telephone 041 445 2466).