

## Addressing (Not Tolerating or Ignoring) Verbal Abuse

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With civility seemingly on the decline across all social sectors, healthcare staff need to be more prepared than ever to deal with hostility directed at them

situation early. Examples of verbal abuse include<sup>ii</sup>:

- Persistent swearing
- Yelling
- Sexist comments (both explicit and implied)
- Racist comments (both explicit and implied)
- Irrelevant personal remarks (e.g. about your appearance)
- Threats (e.g. I'll have you fired)
- Intimidating silence
- Accusations of various sorts (e.g. calling you a racist)
- Comments about your competency, knowledge, dedication

Example: A patient accuses you of being incom

### Verbal Abuse

Nothing excuses verbal abuse, but starting with the mindset that the person is in need won't make the situation worse and allows for the opportunity to attempt to diffuse the

when you're irate." Mr. Jones: "I'm NOT irate!"

In response to an upset person's circular rant, psychologist James Cawood recommends interrupting their cognitive process; for example, in a soft, calm tone of voice, "Mr. Jones, I feel your frustration, but you're **shouting so loud I can't hear you**. So much energy is coming at me I'm afraid I'm missing some of your words and I want to hear you so we can find a way forward." Dr. Cawood advises calmly listening and using non-assertive, non-judgmental statements ("I heard you say . . ."), and not challenging the person's statement or perception.<sup>iii</sup>

An example of subjective documentation of an encounter may be: *Mr. Jones arrived for his appointment without wearing a mask. Clinic staff gave Mr. Jones a mask to wear, but he angrily refused to wear it and became combative.*

Compare objective documentation of the same encounter: *Mr. Jones arrived for his appointment without wearing a mask. Clinic staff gave Mr. Jones a mask to wear, but he refused to wear*

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those who perceive they have some control over a situation **are less likely to act out violently.**

Example: Mr. Peacock, a roofer, was hospitalized after a car accident left him paralyzed from the waist down. He was verbally abusive to staff and no one wanted to enter his room. For example, while throwing things, he yelled "Stop telling me what to do! Get out of here!" Reco

**TIP:** Asking yourself, “How does this person perceive they are losing control?” may quickly provide insight regarding a way in which to help the person regain a feeling of control.<sup>x</sup>

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