



## Unruly Behavior Disrupts

Dear Member of the Community,

The airlines today are often in the media for unruly passengers and how it impacts the safety of the flight. General decency appears to have decreased as witnessed by media articles, an example being pop warner football cancellation due to unruly parent. What's not talked about as often, or even at all, is the current situation in healthcare with unruly patients, family members and visitors.

I was recently on a zoom meeting with a good number of hospital CEO's from the CNY region. The purpose of the meeting was to share information regarding patient care demands on our healthcare systems. Those demands at present exceed the capacity of most healthcare organizations. We discussed what can be done at the local as well as the state level to help during this crisis so that we can be here for community members when they need us most. As many of you are aware, there are a number of variables that have impacted healthcare staffing resulting in insufficient staff to meet today's higher volume and higher acuity patient population.

The conversation shifted during this meeting to the topic I opened this letter with. Questions were raised as to the negative experience that hard working healthcare staff are having in the work place. I chimed in as just the other day I talked to an Oneida Health nurse who was injured by an angry patient. The injury was not just the physical bruise, but also the emotional injury, both of which were very evident. Other CEO's voiced concern for the safety and wellbeing of their staff who many times face work place violence on an all too frequent basis.

At Oneida Health, we track these behavior issues through our incident report process and data reflects that our staff have been exposed to well over 40 such incidents over the past year. I know that incidents occur more frequently, and go unreported. We have placed signage throughout the organization that violence, physical or verbal, against our staff will not be tolerated and we will pursue charges to the fullest extent of the law. We have trained staff on de-escalation techniques, yet the aggressive, inappropriate behavior continues. This is unacceptable!

Until you are verbally or physically abused, it is difficult to appreciate the harm as well as the toll it takes on these hardworking, talented staff. They work each day, referred to in the recent past as healthcare heroes, yet I'm afraid they really do not feel that way. Many have left important jobs in key settings, like the Emergency Department, because the demands and at times difficult situations, far outweigh the job satisfaction that they went into this profession for.

What can be done to turn this around? First and foremost, stop and think before acting aggressively towards a healthcare worker. It is understood that there are times when you as a patient are struggling and perhaps feel that the healthcare system is not doing enough for you or your loved one. I understand that happens, but...it does not get fixed by being physically or verbally abusive.

We as a community should know that without these talented healthcare workers, we don't have a hospital, an ER, or an OR to be there when the need arises. What is needed are more persons entering the healthcare employment arena, while we work to retain the talented staff of today. Without that, I am pretty sure our healthcare system will continue to struggle and eventually fail to be there when you need it most.

So please, control your emotions, communicate with staff and listen to what is being explained. If you don't agree or have further questions, you have a right to receive additional information. The word thank you goes a long way to show your appreciation to the healthcare worker who ensures that Oneida Health is there for you 24/7/365. Positive recognition will go a long way in addressing today's challenging healthcare environment.

Sincerely,

Gene F. Morreale  
President and CEO