

The benefits of Taser CEWs in a healthcare setting

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In this article, the authors maintain that if properly used by trained security officers Taser CEWs result in significant reductions in injuries and reduction in costs by type of injury. HSS's security officers have carried Taser CEW's in hospitals for more than 10 years in 40 facilities across the country producing no negative CMS finding or excessive use of force claims, they report.

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Clinical staff and healthcare security staff face a difficult challenge: their fundamental role of providing for the care and safety of patients has not changed; however, the healthcare environment in which they operate has changed dramatically.

INCREASING VIOLENCE IN HEALTHCARE

Violence in the healthcare industry is on the rise. Staff are routinely exposed to violent and combative patients and visitors under the influence of drugs and alcohol or suffering from psychological disorders. In many instances hospital staff, including security officers, are insufficiently educated about how to work effectively with combative and aggressive patients in the care setting. Frequently, security teams aren't equipped with the defensive tools and technology needed to suitably and effectively manage these same patients.

Hospital administrators and risk managers seek a deeper understanding of the various use of force tools and technology that can help keep staff and patients safe while reducing overall risk and liability exposure.

A number of factors may influence these decisions, such as the acuity and demographics of the patient population; the analysis of historical events of past aggressive incidents; local crime rate; and, the demographics associated with the location, type, size and trauma level designation of the healthcare organization. The degree of potential force of a weapon is also an important factor. For many healthcare administrators, Conducted Energy Weapons, or Taser CEW's, are an acceptable option.

EFFECTIVENESS OF TASER CEW IN A HEALTHCARE SETTING

A Taser CEW is a conducted electrical weapon used to deliver electrical current that disrupts muscle control, or neuromuscular incapacitation and painful stimuli. Manufactured by Taser International, Inc. of Scottsdale, Arizona, Taser CEW's are classified as non-lethal weapons defined by

the US Department of Defense. These non-lethal weapons are used by over 15,000 law enforcement agencies and security teams, and are deployed, on average, 904 times every day. Taser CEW's are, we believe, a safe alternative to de-escalate a threatening individual without causing permanent damage.

Similar to a firearm, a Taser CEW's offers a psychological deterrence factor; however, unlike a firearm, a Taser CEW can be deployed during aggressive situations of violence where deadly force is not warranted or needed. In HSS's experience, incidents in which the threat of deadly force is warranted are extremely rare. In fact, in many situations, officers have simply informed combative individuals that they carried a Taser CEW resulting in immediate de-escalation. In some cases, the mere presence of a Taser CEW on a security officer's duty belt has improved the behavior of aggressive patients. These circumstances illustrate the effectiveness of Taser CEWs as psychological deterrents of violence.

Numerous studies indicate that the introduction of Taser CEW's

into a healthcare setting helps to avert and control situations that otherwise might have resulted in further injury to subjects, patients and staff. (*The Journal of Emergency Medicine. Violence: Recognition, Management and Prevention*).

For example, a report funded by the International Healthcare Security and Safety Foundation (IHSSF) and investigated by Duke University Medical Center found a 41% lower risk of physical assault among hospitals with Taser CEW's available for security personnel to carry and use compared to those without Taser CEW. When Taser CEW's are deployed to manage combative and violent patients, the data shows a number of positive outcomes, such as a significant reduction in excessive force claims (up to a 95% reduction resulting in a reduction of more than \$6M in costs over a 5-year period in a recent MMRMA study).

HSS's data supports this finding. Nationally, we have more than 40 healthcare facilities that employ Taser CEW devices and we have found that, when compared against our other 140+ healthcare facilities without Taser

CEW's there is a significant correlation in both reductions in injuries and reduction in costs by type of injury. Sixty-two percent of those sites show a significant reduction in the number of staff injuries and 54% of those sites showed a significant reduction in the costs of injury type.

Taser CEW's offer additional benefits when contrasted with other forms of physical de-escalation intervention such as chemical irritant sprays like OC and Pepper Spray. The deployment of a chemical agent within the confines of a healthcare facility can cause significant operational impacts and delays due to the need to decontaminate the treatment area.

When contrasted with impact weapons, such as expandable batons, Taser CEW offers advantages as well. Batons tend to cause significant injuries, even when utilized correctly, whereas the Taser CEW allows for almost immediate recovery with limited, to no, lasting effects.

IMPORTANCE OF USE OF FORCE PROGRAMS AND POLICIES

The appropriate use of Taser CEW's by trained, competent

POPULAR TASER CEW MYTHS

Taser CEWs Are Lethal Weapons

Numerous reputable studies conducted on Taser CEW use indicate they are safe. In 2007, researchers from Wake Forest University examined 1,000 instances of Taser CEW use and found that in 997 of these instances there were no injuries, or mild injuries that did not require hospitalization. Of the three odd instances that required hospitalization, two were from the fall resulting from the Taser CEW use, and the third person was admitted with a condition unrelated to Taser CEW (http://www.wakehealth.edu/NewsReleases/2007/Nationwide_Independent_TASER_CEW_CEW%20AE_Study_Results_Suggest_Devices_are_Safe.htm).

Doesn't a Taser CEW Electrocute?

No. A Taser CEW delivers 1,200 volts of electricity to the body, at an amperage that is 1/10 that of a strong electric shock. For perspective, consider that a standard wall outlet produces 16 amps, a holiday tree bulb produces 1 amp, while the Taser CEW produces 0.0036 amps (Marveggio report).

Taser CEW CEWs Are Easy to Misuse

If a situation is escalating or use-of-force becomes necessary, there will be some risk involved regardless of the method used. There are some compelling safety options available with Taser CEW CEWs to ensure accountability and to keep an accurate record of use, unlike alternative types of use-of-force. For example, a Taser CEW can be outfitted with a device called Taser CEW Cam, which is an accessory used to automatically record both audio and video of Taser CEW deployments. Taser CEW Cam helps to produce an accurate record each time a Taser CEW is used.

The Use of TASER CEW CEW's Inside Healthcare Facilities Does Not Comply with CMS Guidelines

Under CMS' interpretive guidelines to section 482.13(e) of the State Operations Manual, the use of a weapon is considered a law enforcement action, not a healthcare intervention. CMS does not support the use of weapons by hospital staff as a means of subduing a patient in order to place that patient in restraint or seclusion. The interpretive guidelines state that "if a weapon is used by security or law enforcement on a person in a hospital to protect people or hospital property from harm, we would expect the situation to be handled as a criminal activity..."

It is incredibly important that hospital staff, especially security staff who may carry a Taser CEW device understand the CMS requirements. For example, Taser CEW should not be used to coerce a patient back into bed simply because they are not complying with verbal commands. It is our belief that Taser CEW CEWs should only be used when there is an imminent risk of bodily injury and the incident rises to a level of criminal activity.

staff, together with the healthcare facility's policies, and applicable law reduces the risk of injury to patients and staff. In addition to having an articulate use of force policy in place and following the recommended manufacturer training by Taser International, healthcare facilities should also develop a Taser CEW policy and procedure, including the relevant policy guidelines as well as Taser CEW training and usage procedures. The policy should also include information on force continuum considerations, CMS guidelines on the use of Taser CEW's within healthcare facilities, and other factors for determining the reasonable level of force to use.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We believe there is sufficient evidence to support the use of Taser CEW's in hospitals in situations that represent an imminent risk of bodily injury and that rise to the level of criminal activity. HSS's security officers have carried Taser CEW's in hospitals for more than 10 years in facilities across the country producing no negative CMS finding or excessive use of force claims. This

track record is based on a combination of sound policies, training and understanding of the capabilities of the Taser CEW device. Ultimately, Taser CEW's have not only helped reduce injuries associated with aggressive behavior, but have also helped to improve hospital staff perceptions of safety on campus.

Vesting officers with the authority to use reasonable force while protecting the welfare and safety of patients, staff, and visitors requires a careful balancing of patient care and staff safety.

Whether healthcare administrators decide to equip their security team with firearms, or less-than-lethal tools, such as chemical agents, impact weapons, or Taser CEW's, the primary aggression management technique should always include verbal de-escalation first, but when verbal de-escalation techniques have failed, and staff is facing injury due to physical assault, the Taser CEW is an effective means of controlling the situation and stopping the aggressive action. This is true when actually deployed or simply through the psychological deterrent value of the device. In our experience, Taser CEW's are a non-lethal

weapon option that hospital leaders should strongly consider.

References

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