

Case Study 2: Aggressive Abusive Patient - Suggested Solution

This patient's treatment has been badly managed to the point that he is becoming violent and aggressive, because

- a) He is clearly in a significant amount of worsening discomfort
- b) He is feeling ignored by the staff

Therefore this patient has progressed in his behaviour to the point that certain de-escalation strategies are now obsolete (e.g. offering food is not going to help this situation at all). However there are solutions to this problem and it is the patient himself who is pointing this out: the pain he is in is the immediate cause of his behaviour. Therefore once this has been addressed his behaviour should become more amenable. Beyond this direct cause and effect, the patient needs to be reassured; he has become frustrated with the manner in which he has been treated by other staff ("Are you going to help me?" "You're as disinterested as everybody else, aren't you?"). So, here is a potential route of de-escalation for this situation:

- Find out the patient's name.
- Establish roughly how he has been left on his own.
- Introduce yourself and state your profession.
- Reassure the patient that you are there to help, but this is the first you've heard of their problem and it may take a few minutes to find a solution. Just because a solution isn't found immediately does not mean that he is being ignored, these things just take time.
- Clarify whether the pain has gotten worse since he last spoke to an AHP. It may be that the previous member of staff was/is not aware of the urgency of the patient's need for medication.
- If possible, find out who the previous member of staff was – if you know this AHP well you may have an idea of what is taking them so long/how likely it is that they have assumed another task.

Once this information has been gathered, the situation (i.e. the patient's behaviour) may well have changed simply through this interaction. If the patient does calm down a little, for whatever reason (e.g. realising that the person getting his meds is not aware of the urgency of his situation because of a worsening pain) clarify whether he will be ok if left alone for a very short period of time while you either locate the member of staff responsible for the patient or find another member of staff who can find this person while you return to the patient to make sure the situation does not escalate again.

If the patient is still as aggressive as shown in the video, it would be prudent to get the attention of another member of staff as quickly as possible (the efficiency of this will depend on your hospital's communication systems e.g. call buttons or proximity of the nearest phone). This will have the effect of conveying team unity to the patient and increases the likelihood of his backing down, and also allow for coordination in finding the aforementioned responsible member of staff.

The patient striking themselves on the head is quite alarming. Once the pain medication has been dealt with, it should be a priority to clarify why he is doing this.