

Healthcare Campuses Need a Strong Perimeter Security Strategy

There are growing concerns about the increase in violence occurring within healthcare facilities, putting the safety and well-being of patients, staff, and visitors at risk. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, violence against hospital employees has markedly increased — and there is no sign it is receding. The American Hospital Administration (AHA) shared that [44% of nurses report](#) experiencing physical violence and 68% report experiencing verbal abuse during the pandemic.

All levels of hospital personnel are experiencing these issues. The [American College of Emergency Physicians](#) shares that 70 percent of emergency physicians have reported acts of violence against them, yet only 3 percent pressed charges. Nurses in particular have reported experiencing alarming levels of stress and anxiety due to unsafe working conditions, according to a 2022 survey by [National Nurses United](#). Nearly half of hospital nurses reported an increase in workplace violence, a 57% increase from September 2021 and 119% increase from March 2021. And, [studies](#) show that less than half of injuries are *even reported*. As a result, hospitals are feeling the economic toll. Due to [nursing vacancies](#), healthcare facilities are forced to hire contracted travel nurses who typically require higher wages.

These staggering figures have prompted [federal agencies](#), such as the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, to urge hospital and healthcare facility leaders to improve safety and implement strategies to protect staff, patients, and visitors. Last year, [the Joint Commission](#), which accredits U.S. healthcare organizations, issued requirements for hospitals to develop effective workplace violence prevention strategies.

One of the best ways to do this is by preventing violent acts *before they occur*, in an incident prevention strategy that starts at your perimeter. Using technology-based solutions, such as AI-powered surveillance and [license plate recognition](#), can extend your awareness to the very moment a known threat enters your parking lot.

Your first layer of defense: Technology

When it comes to perimeter security, technology should be your first line of defense. While physical security measures help to create a barrier between a potential threat and the campus, technology-based solutions can provide real-time information about potential threats and help to prevent unauthorized access.

AI-enhanced video surveillance systems can help increase situational awareness for healthcare facilities. Using advanced video analytics, the technology can detect violent behavior or fights in real-time and alert hospital security personnel. Some features may also include the ability to detect previously identified offenders.

[Most people arrive at healthcare facilities in vehicles. Automated license plate recognition](#) (ALPR) camera systems are specifically calibrated to detect and recognize license plates. Unlike traditional video security cameras, an ALPR system makes license plate reader

evidence easily accessible and quickly searchable, saving security personnel time and ensuring an immediate, real-time alert.

If a crime or incident of violence occurs, the ALPR footage can be narrowed down based on the timeframe, vehicle color, vehicle type, make, or other descriptors, such as alterations and damage — even without a full license plate number. In fact, the most advanced ALPR systems can detect stolen and altered license plates – or even flag a vehicle when the plate has been removed.

By creating a virtual security perimeter with ALPR cameras positioned on ingress and egress points of your hospital, security personnel can use vehicle data to quickly identify and intercept threats in real-time.

Proactively stop threats before anyone is hurt

Healthcare workers are four times more likely to be assaulted than private industry workers, according to [the Joint Commission](#). Given this alarming statistic, it is crucial that effective deterrence begins as soon as a potential threat crosses the perimeter of your facility. As soon as a known offender enters a hospital or medical building, the situation can escalate quickly, putting staff and patients at risk.

Some of the more advanced ALPR systems enable hospital security personnel to receive real-time alerts when previously-identified vehicles of concern enter a facility. This list might consist of vehicles known to belong to banned visitors, violent patients, or disgruntled terminated employees. The most common assailants of healthcare workers are patients, many of whom are well-known, repeat offenders. The combination of long waiting times, staff shortages, and public access to patient areas are among the highest contributing factors to violence. By knowing these repeat offenders, staff can proactively monitor their behavior and use caution.

Say, for instance, that a patient physically assaulted a nurse in the past. A hospital's security team can review ALPR and video surveillance footage to identify the offender's license plate number and vehicle description. That information can then be entered into the ALPR system in order to initiate an alert. Once the vehicle enters the premises again, hospital security personnel will be alerted.

Patients who know they are being targeted or in danger, such as those in domestic disputes or under protective orders, can also report those license plates to security when they enter a hospital. This is important for patient and employee safety, as well as patient experience – this security measure ensures that patients feel secure and safe while they are being cared for.

For example, in one instance a soon-to-be mother entered the hospital to give birth. The baby's father was an individual of concern who had already been reported by the mother to the local police, and thousands of agencies who also use ALPR systems. His license plate was added to

the ALPR system's alert feature, and when he attempted to breach the hospital campus grounds, security personnel were aware and prevented him from entering.

With this added ability to proactively monitor known threats, hospital security (and law enforcement, if they choose to share alerts) can then take appropriate measures to deter potential violence before it takes place without endangering patients or staff.

Another important benefit of an advanced ALPR system is the shared network it supports between connected healthcare facilities. For hospital systems that have multiple locations, an ALPR network allows for a shared database that breaks down silos between security teams on different campuses.

Say, for instance, that a patient physically assaulted a doctor in the past. A hospital's security team can then enter the individual's license plate into the system in order to initiate an alert. In the event that the same offender approaches a different location a few weeks later or even months, security personnel in that hospital building will be proactively alerted.

Strengthen investigations so repeat offenders don't return

As the healthcare industry continues to face an increase in violence, there are a number of steps that can be taken to strengthen investigations and make sure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

One of the most important things that healthcare campuses can do is to invest in high-quality security cameras. These cameras should be placed in strategic locations around the perimeter of the campus, and they should be monitored constantly. If there is an incident, the footage from these cameras can be used to identify the perpetrator and help with the investigation. Security personnel can gather details from surveillance cameras, like vehicle characteristics (color, make characteristics) or time of entry/exit, from security video to enter it into their ALPR system.

Another key step is to develop a good working relationship with local law enforcement. In many cases, police will be called to investigate incidents that occur on healthcare campuses. They also may be receiving alerts if stolen vehicles or wanted persons enter the healthcare facility.

Through the use of technological solutions, hospitals can better collaborate with law enforcement in order to assess evolving risks and ensure that investigative evidence on violent attacks are strong enough to secure prosecutions.

Healthcare security must evolve to keep up with current challenges

As the healthcare industry continues to grow and evolve, so too must the security measures in place to protect patients, staff, and visitors. The perimeter of a healthcare

campus is the first line of defense against potential threats, and a strong perimeter security strategy is essential to keeping everyone safe.

If you are a leader in the healthcare industry, I strongly encourage you to work with your security teams and law enforcement to implement proactive security technologies for the protection of your staff, patients, and visitors.

Author: Robert Parks

Robert Parks, LPC, CFI is a commercial solutions consultant for [Flock Safety](#) with over 15 years of experience in global security operations, programs, and technology management. He formerly served as Head of Public Safety at a large healthcare organization and as Manager of Asset Protection at a major international retail chain. Prior to joining the private sector, Parks was a law enforcement officer and worked for the Department of Homeland Security.