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Violence Against Doctors in Catalonia and Proceedings by the Catalonia Medical Council

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Violence against health professionals impacts both on the individual and on healthcare systems. Almost 25% of workplace violence belongs to the health sector. In 2001-2002, UK registered 14 incidents per month per 1,000 healthcare workers. In Spain, one third of physicians reported in 2004 having experienced a violent episode during his career. In a study in 2006, 11% of healthcare professionals suffered physical assaults and 64% psychological violence (26.9% and 51.6% respectively at Psychiatric Services), but only a 3.7% of physical assaults and no cases of threats or insults were officially reported.

Rates of complaints are alarmingly low, which requires a comprehensive approach. The UK launched in 1999 the "Zero Tolerance Zone Campaign" and reported incidents increased substantially, with a reverse trend in their severity.

Many prevention plans, records, training courses and awareness campaigns have been developed in Spain and the Supreme Court started considering the assault on a public health professional as a "crime of assault of a public official" in 2007, which increased the penalty. The Unit for Violence Against Physicians (UVAP) was created in Catalonia by Barcelona's College of Physicians in 2010, and gives comprehensive advice to doctors. The UVAP handles 3-4 incidents per month, mainly of low-level violence and UVAP actions ranges from legal or security advice to legal action against the aggressor. Cases handled by the UVAP represent only the tip of the iceberg, but a short survey among physicians suggest that the mere existence of the unit decreases increases the feeling of safety.