

ASPR TRACIE Technical Assistance Request

Request Receipt Date (by ASPR TRACIE): 27 November 2018

Response Date: 5 December 2018; updated 30 June 2023

Type of TA Request: Standard

Request:

The requestor asked for assistance in searching for policies and procedures related to the use of metal detectors in hospitals.

Response:

The ASPR TRACIE Team reached out to ASPR TRACIE Subject Matter Expert (SME) Cadre members for resources and feedback. Section I in this document includes the opinions and anecdotal information received from the ASPR TRACIE SME Cadre members.

The ASPR TRACIE Team also conducted a search online for policies and procedures for metal detectors in hospitals. Those resources are provided in Section II of this document, along with other relevant materials that can be found in Section III.

I. ASPR TRACIE SME Cadre Member Comments

Please note: These are direct quotes or paraphrased comments from emails and other correspondence provided by SME Cadre members in response to this specific request. They do not necessarily express the views of ASPR or ASPR TRACIE.

SME Cadre Member 1

- Metal detectors should meet industry standards and requirements.
- The metal detector should be placed inside the physical space of the hospital prior to true entry into the hospital.
- Weather plays a factor on the type of device to include (e.g., moisture, humidity levels, and temperature fluctuations).
- The hospital should develop their own policies and procedures on how staff are to maintain, train, and utilize the equipment.
- There should always be someone staffing the metal detector.
- Since a tragedy recently occurred at our hospital, we have placed walk-through metal detectors at three main entrance points. Feedback from everyone was positive.
- Since then, we now also have X-ray machines at those three entrance points. One of the main catalysts to getting X-ray machines was to help scan patients that are immunocompromised (e.g., cancer patients) as our staff are not permitted to touch their belongings. For the most part this has been viewed as positive by everyone.

SME Cadre Member 2

- Many hospitals have considered whether or not metal detectors would enhance security.
- We have considered them for all of our healthcare system's hospitals, but none have been approved to date. However, the issue is being revisited at our specific facility due to some recent incidents in which weapons were found on a patient and visitor.
- The pros we have identified are:
 - They can detect many types of weapons containing metals.
 - They provide staff with some psychological support and give them a sense that the facility is doing all it can to protect them.
 - They can be used as a deterrent. If signs are posted then some people may be less inclined to enter the facility with their weapon.
- The cons we have identified are:
 - They are expensive to purchase and maintain.
 - They will not detect every weapon, which can provide a false sense of security.
 - They do not provide 100% protection against the risk unless they are installed at every entrance point.
 - The process will not work unless the facility has security personnel to operate and staff the metal detectors.
 - Security personnel should be armed and ready to engage if a problem occurs. Many hospitals do not have armed officers, and this could require supplemental staffing, which adds an extra expense.
 - To some patients and visitors, the metal detectors give the impression that they are coming into a secure fortress rather than a place of healing.
 - They can require a considerable amount of space.
 - They can cause personnel backups for those waiting to go through the metal detector and into the facility.
- It might be more cost effective for facilities to hire local off-duty police officers to staff high risk areas.

SME Cadre Member 3

- Our hospital previously looked into getting metal detectors, but we decided against it because of the potential negative perception on behalf of patients and family members.
- Additionally, installing metal detectors would require they be staffed by law enforcement personnel with arrest power in the event they detect and need to confiscate a weapon from an individual. Our current security force does not have this capability.

SME Cadre Member 4

- The topic of metal detectors is coming up again with renewed interest in our hospitals in the south region of the state, especially in light of another recent hospital shooting that received national attention.
- A number of our hospitals in the south region of the state have handheld metal detectors. These were purchased with ASPR funds a number of years ago and are maintained by the security department.
- The cost of walk-through metal detectors at entrances has been considered. The issue is that there are multiple public entrances at the hospitals. We understand that high-risk

areas are the Emergency Room, Intensive Care Unit, Oncology, and Labor, Delivery, Recovery, Postpartum Department. That said, aggressive patients can present in outpatient facilities as well.

- Even if walk-through detectors were made available, there would be a need for additional security officers to be hired to operate such stations and there has not been funding allocated for them.
- The walk-through detectors are also cost-prohibitive (\$2000- \$4000 each for the simpler versions and \$6000 for the higher end models).
- There are also issues related to people seeking care who have orthopedic implants, pacemakers, defibrillators, and the like, which could set off the detectors.
- There are also concerns related to patient satisfaction and risk perception, delays in seeking care related to possible backups at the stations, and historically marginalized community members who may be afraid of security.
- Security officers in many hospitals remain unarmed, and most are contracted. Trauma centers tend to have agreements with armed police officers, but this is not the case for the average community hospital.
- My own experience is that staff can request security to do a weapons check, but this is not done routinely. There are also not many specific metal detector procedures or policies other than the hospital's Security Management Policy and Procedures (which typically list the availability of equipment such as handheld devices).
- There was a [national survey](#) conducted in June 2016 by Health Facilities Management and the American Society for Healthcare Engineering (ASHE). Only 7.5% of 255 respondents noted that their hospitals had walk-through metal detection models. Apparently, most of these hospitals are in the western U.S.
 - **ASPR TRACIE NOTE:** The survey was [updated in 2018](#) and was conducted by Health Facilities Management and the International Association for Healthcare Security & Safety (IAHSS). Results from this survey indicated an increased use of handheld detectors (rather than the walk-through type). The percentage of hospitals that use them rose from 33% in the previous survey to 50% in this survey indicating that they may be a more cost-effective way to deploy metal detectors.
- Many hospitals have added de-escalation training, but as we know this is not always effective. There is interest from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the U.S. Department of Occupational Safety and Health Administration in this topic as well.

II. Hospital Metal Detector Policies

HCA Healthcare. (2020). [Information Protection and Security Search and Seizure Policy](#).

This document outlines the policies and procedures for HCA Healthcare facilities in the U.S. regarding conducting search and seizure in order to provide a safe environment for individuals within the facility. It addresses the use of metal detectors.

St. Cloud Hospital. (2012). [Metal Detection Policy](#). Minnesota Department of Health.

This document provides policies and procedures on the use of metal detector screening for persons entering St. Cloud Hospital (MN).

III. Other Relevant Resources

Blando, J., Paul, C., and Szklo-Coxe, M. (2020). [Risk Factors for Workplace Encounters with Weapons by Hospital Employees](#). Public Health in Practice, 2, 1-4, Article 100105.

The objective of this study was to determine the risk factors that were associated with frequent weapons confiscation in a health care facility. The authors conducted a cross-sectional study survey with hospital security directors. Results indicated that hospitals with metal detectors were five times more likely to confiscate weapons, suggesting that metal detectors are effective. They also found that hospitals with psychiatric units were more likely to report confiscation of weapons, which was likely due to the standard procedure of searching patients before admissions.

Fiorino, D. Easter, J., and Kehr. W. (2022). [Metal Detectors Improve Patient's Sense of Safety in the Emergency Department](#). Western Journal of Emergency Medicine. 23(4).

The authors of this study surveyed patients in an emergency department (ED) to assess their sense of safety based on the use of metal detectors. The response rate was 78% (303 patients completed the survey) and results indicated that 91% of participants reported that metal detectors improved their sense of safety in the ED.

Huddy, J. (2017). [Design Considerations for a Safer Emergency Department](#). American College of Emergency Physicians.

The author discusses safety and security specific to walk-in/public areas, emergency medical system entry points, forensic patients, general emergency department care areas, and patients with behavioral health issues.

McDonnell Busenbark, M. (2022). [How to Protect Staff and Patients from Violence in the Hospital](#). Children's Hospital Association.

This article addresses the use of metal detectors in various children's hospitals across the U.S. and identifies the pros and cons of implementing them.

Morgan, J. (2021). [Health Care Security Experts Weigh in On Metal Detector Usage](#). Health Facilities Management.

In this article, leaders in health care security share their perspective on the use of metal detectors in the ED.

Sanson, T.G. (2020). [Are the Benefits of Metal Detectors Worth the Costs?](#) ACEP Now. 39(11).

The author of this article identifies the disadvantages of having metal detectors in the ED (e.g., the large amount of space needed for the equipment and potentially creating wait lines for patients and visitors).