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Press Release

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Nurses demanding action to ensure safe workplaces
Texas shooting death of healthcare professionals leaves nursing community devastated… again

"We mourn for our colleagues and their families across the nation," said VNA President Linda Shepherd following the October 23 shooting at Methodist Dallas Medical Center that left two employees, Jacqueline Ama Pokuaa and nurse Annette Flowers, dead."

"There must be a zero tolerance policy for such malicious acts against a person's life," she emphasized." We cannot continue to disrespect healthcare workers who have dedicated their lives to helping others."

VNA & VNF CEO Janet Wall added, "Workplace violence at any level is unacceptable! The fact that nurses and others are attacked and abused – and in too many instances killed – while at the bedside is beyond belief, yet we see it happen day after day. It's crucial that all nurses get involved as we continue to advocate in both the legislative and practice settings for safe workplaces."

Healthcare professionals face an elevated risk of workplace violence from patients and other individuals; as much as five times higher in hospitals than the national average. These alarming numbers both exacerbate the current staffing crisis and ultimately jeopardize patient safety and quality outcomes.

Pokuaa and Flowers were shot and killed in the hospital's maternal-child unit while caring for some of the most vulnerable patients. Earlier this month, nurse June Onkunki was fatally stabbed by a patient in Durham, North Carolina and three more healthcare professionals were fatally assaulted in the facilities where they worked while caring for patients.

Workplace violence for nursing remains a top concern among nurses. In 2017, VNA successfully advocated for a bill in which battery of a healthcare professional in any area of the hospital would result in a mandatory minimum sentence. In 2019, VNA supported legislation to create a misdemeanor for making a verbal threat to kill or do bodily harm to a healthcare worker on the job. We have made incremental progress, but change remains slow on this issue.

Policies must be enacted by employers to better ensure healthcare professionals' safety at work.

VNA and ANA support current federal legislation (H.R. 1195/S4182) that requires the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to develop and implement specific standards for citations and penalties against employers who fail to act.

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About Virginia Nurses Association

The Virginia Nurses Association (VNA) is the professional organization representing the interests of the more than 100,000 registered nurses in the Commonwealth of Virginia, inclusive of all areas of specialization, clinical settings and work environments. We are the voice of nursing, protecting practice by ensuring that nursing's priorities are incorporated into legal and regulatory decisions, and ensuring our voice and influence at the capitol and growing grassroots efforts. Together with our national partner the American Nurses Association (ANA), we are dedicated to advancing nurses and the nursing profession through advocacy.