**Dealing with Hostile or Potentially Violent Clients (Front Counters)**

**Background:**

Violence can be an issue at front counters. Situations have occurred from verbal abuse to physical assault. Even though at times verbal comments can be determined as ‘part of the job’ it is still a form of violence.

Violence is any threatening statement or behaviour that gives a worker reasonable cause to believe that they are at risk.

**Pre-Procedure:**

* Observe the client and prepare to be approached
* Watch their body language and maintain eye contact
* Always remain calm

**Procedure:**

* Ensure the other staff members are aware of the irate client
* Greet the client with a smile. A smile can often defuse and potentially negative confrontation
* Whenever possible use their name
* Listen to all of their issues and allow them to discuss first
* Be empathetic and sincere with your response (i.e.: “I understand, I would feel the same way...”)
* Do not fake your response
* Ask questions, as to ‘why’ they may be feeling this way (i.e.: ‘Were you aware of the guidelines prior to coming here?’). This will help you gain control of the discussion, it shows you are interested and listening to the patrons concerns, and you are gathering information for a quicker solution.
* Gently explain the reasons behind your answers. Do not assume the client already knows
* When possible disengage from the client (i.e.: “I will go find the information for you.”). This will give the client an opportunity to change their mind, or calm down without feeling like they have ‘lost.’
* If you do not know the answer make and effort and go to ‘find out:’
  + Refer to your supervisor
  + Direct the client (i.e.: “A lot of people have said the same thing. Let me give you the name and phone number of the person to talk to.”). This shows you are supportive of their feelings
  + Explore alternatives. Giving them choices or options can assist with their problem and ask for their suggestions.

**Hostile Client:**

* Do not provoke the patron by belittling, lecturing, moralizing or screaming
* If you feel situation is escalating or you are not making any progress try to remove yourself from the situation and find a Manager or Supervisor
* If you cannot remove yourself from the situation, utilize any “Call for Assistance” electronic device you may have
* Respect personal space. Do not speak from a distance because it is disrespectful and shows disinterest. Do not speak too close as it increases anxiety and reduces safety
* If you feel threatened by possible physical confrontation remove yourself immediately. Ensure that you have a barrier between yourself and the client (i.e.: counter, chair).
* If you are attacked or a weapon is drawn on you - press the panic button (If available) and attempt to remove yourself from the situation.
* Follow all directions of anyone who has drawn a weapon on you – do not attempt to be a hero.

**Post Procedure:**

* Follow-through. Ensure you do what you said you would do for the patron or you may make the patron angrier.
* If you are threatened, ensure you notify your supervisor and utilize the “Call for Assistance” button.
* Document incident on a “Violent Incident Report” and inform your supervisor

**Summary**:

* Inform your supervisor of any public relation issues that arise
* Document the incident and ensure that your supervisor is aware