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## National

### Violence against NHS staff increases to five-year high

**Denis Campbell**  
 Health policy editor

Violence against NHS staff has reached its highest level in five years, with one in seven health professionals attacked in the course of their work last year, figures reveal.

Matt Hancock, the health and social care secretary, will announce the rising trend today when he announces a new initiative to reduce assaults, including speedier prosecutions of offenders.

Ambulance workers, staff in A&E, and mental health personnel have borne the brunt of the increase, which has already prompted MPs to pass new legislation to deter attacks.

The latest survey of NHS staff in England shows that while 15% in 2013 said they had experienced physical violence from patients, relatives or the public in the last year, that increased slightly to 15.2% in 2017.

"NHS staff dedicate their lives to

protecting and caring for us in our times of greatest need and for any one of them to be subject to aggression or violence is completely unacceptable," said Hancock.

"I have made it my personal mission to ensure NHS staff feel safe and secure at work and the new violence reduction strategy will be a key strand of that."

"We will not shy away from the issue. We want to empower staff and give them greater confidence to report violence, knowing that they will see meaningful action from trusts and a consistent prosecution approach from the judicial system."

Hancock will announce the new strategy aimed at eradicating attacks in a speech to the Royal College of Nursing today.

A new partnership between the NHS, Crown Prosecution Service and police forces is being set up to try to bring perpetrators in England to court more speedily, as part of a tough new

zero tolerance approach to such crimes. In addition, NHS trusts will in future be examined on the quality and robustness of their plans to reduce violence as part of Care Quality Commission inspections.

Dr Taj Hassan, president of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, which represents A&E doctors, said: "Patients - and their families - coming into emergency departments are often experiencing the worst day of their lives: worried, confused and often frustrated. This can be understandable."

"What is unacceptable, though, is when this spills over into violence. Staff always seek to give the best care possible in a hugely pressurised

environment; it is always wrong to lash out at those trying to help."

Jacalyn Williams, a national officer for health with the union Unite, added: "This initiative to combat violence against those who work in the NHS is welcomed, but the proof of the pudding will be in the eating."

"Unite will be monitoring the government's actions against this growing and very unpleasant phenomenon that is blighting such areas as A&E departments to see it follows through with its new tough zero tolerance policy."

The Association of Ambulance Chief Executives welcomed action to tackle the "violence that many NHS staff, including ambulance crews, endure on a daily basis".

"It is a sad fact that almost none of the perpetrators receive custodial sentences when they are prosecuted for assaulting our staff," the association's managing director, Martin Flaherty, said. "Therefore, we hope that the closer working links between the NHS, police and the CPS described by the secretary of state today will help directly address this situation, ideally with the Ministry of Justice directing courts to be much tougher when sentencing those found guilty of assaulting and threatening our staff, prosecuting those people to the full extent of the law and actually imposing custodial sentences upon them."

### Concern for hundreds of jobs as Sports Direct buys up Evans Cycles

**Sarah Butler**

Mike Ashley's Sports Direct has bought Evans Cycles out of administration but has said it may have to close half the specialist retailer's 62 stores, putting about 440 jobs at risk.

Evans, which traces its roots back nearly 100 years, had been seeking a buyer after its management team said it needed £20m for a turnaround plan that its former private equity owners were unwilling to fund.

Sports Direct bought House of Fraser in a similar deal in August and also thought to be interested in buying Debenhams, the department store group in which it owns a large stake.

Ashley, the chief executive of Sports Direct, said: "We are pleased to have rescued the Evans Cycles brand. However, to save the business we only believe we will be able to keep 50% of stores open."

Evans, which employs 1,300 people, about 830 of whom work in stores, had been struggling to survive amid tough high street conditions that have already resulted in the collapse of Toys R Us, Maplin and House of Fraser and store closures among a string of other well known names.

The cycle retailer faced fierce price competition, particularly from its fast-growing online rival Wiggle.

The retailer slumped nearly £6m into the red in 2016 and has since faced rising business rates, an increase in the minimum wage and a fall in the pound's value, which has made imported goods more expensive.

In the year to October 2017, sales rose nearly 2% to £138m, but the company recorded another loss, of £2.5m.

Amid difficulties across the retail sector, the private equity firm ECI Partners, which bought Evans three years ago, and the retailer's lenders AIB and HSBC were unable to agree on a deal to fund management's rescue plan.

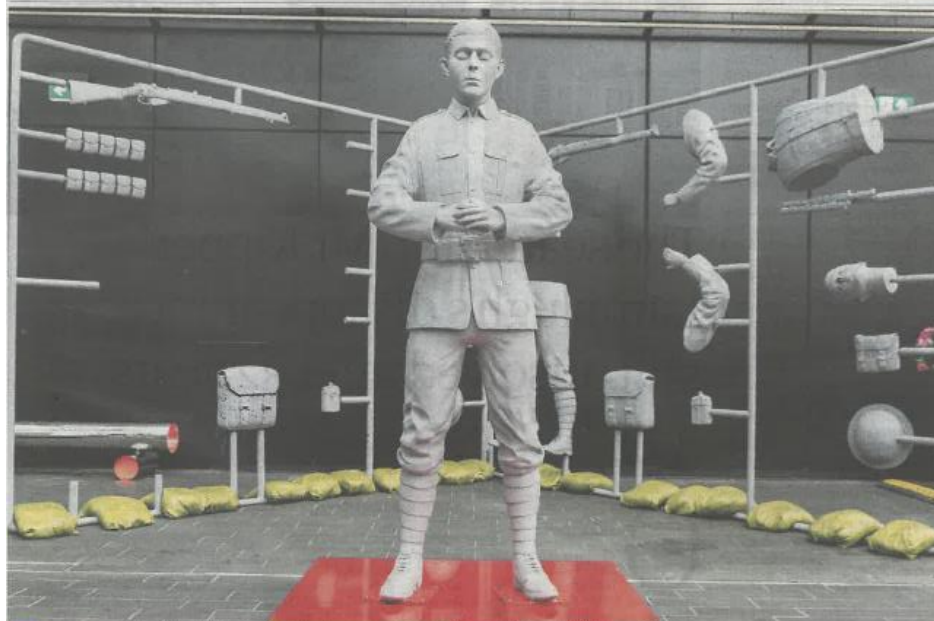
Sports Direct's warning that it was likely to close half of Evans' stores appears to have come as a surprise to PricewaterhouseCoopers, the advisory firm that sealed the sale of Evans.

Matt Callaghan, joint administrator and PwC partner, said: "Evans is a long-standing, well known and trusted brand with nearly 100 years of heritage in the cycling market. To have managed to preserve the business and transfer all staff to the purchaser is particularly pleasing."

"[This year] has been a very difficult trading year for the business, in part due to the impact of the extended winter weather in the early part of the year and a lack of cash to invest in stores and develop the online platform."

**15.2%**

Percentage of NHS staff surveyed in England who had experienced violence from the public in 2017



**Model soldier** Brothers in Arms, an art installation at Crossrail Place roof garden in Canary Wharf, east London. The work is part of the Remembrance Art Trail, in association with the Royal British Legion, marking the centenary of the end of the first world war, on display throughout the area until 11 November.

PHOTOGRAPH BY REX