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## INNOVATION

# This Tech Startup Wants To Protect Hospital Staff From Potential Violence

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**H**ealthcare workers face some of the highest rates of serious workplace violence—four times more than other private industries, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. That’s a statistic Joe Byham, VP of security operations at Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia, knows firsthand. Nurses are particularly susceptible to violence, and like most hospitals, all Jefferson has is a panic button at the nurses’ station in case of emergency. The problem is, it can be hard to reach that button.

“When you’re being attacked or assaulted, you can’t say ‘Time out while I go find the button and go hit it,’” Byham says.

That’s why Byham and Jefferson nurse Denise Shapiro have worked to partner Jefferson Hospital with Strongline, a company that offers an easier way for nurses and other hospital staff to call for

help in case of emergency. The company’s device consists of a one-square-inch badge that nurses can discreetly pin to their name tags. When the button on a badge is pressed, it sends a low-energy Bluetooth signal to a small port plugged into the wall of a room, which alerts security and shows where the distress call is coming from. The call also gets sent to other nearby employees via text message, who may be able to get to the staff member in danger even faster and help de-escalate the situation.

Strongline is a spinout from software company Collateral Opportunities, which had developed a device to track the location of doctors for the purpose of Medicare billing. About two years ago, the company took the technology to a meeting at Jefferson, where Strongline cofounders Justin Green and Bryan Knowles met Byham, who saw the security advantages of the devices. “Can you make it so when they press this button it can discreetly call security?” Green recalls Byham asking.

The answer to that question is Strongline’s new device.

Workers at Jefferson, from nurses to administrators, are fans. “They came up with this really simple, subtle solution that we felt would keep our employees safe,” says Stephen Klasko, CEO of Jefferson Health. In the next several years, the device will be given to all staff members who interact with patients in Jefferson’s 14 hospitals, and the company has a deal for \$2.5 million per year during the early stages of the rollout.

Thanks to the early work at Jefferson, Strongline is now getting interest from other potential clients. It has pilot programs starting with multiple health systems across the country, Green says, including Children’s Hospital Colorado and West Virginia’s Charleston Area Medical Center. “If we could get to a point where every worker in a health-care environment could have protection like this, we would live in a much safer world,” Green says.