



For Immediate Release

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American Association of Critical-Care Nurses launches free Web-based assessment tool to align hospital performance with AACN Healthy Work Environment Standards

AACN Healthy Work Environment Team Assessment -- developed with Provo, Utah-based VitalSmarts – helps to improve patient safety and staff recruitment/retention, reduces medical errors

ALISO VIEJO, Calif. – November 23, 2009 – The [American Association of Critical-Care Nurses \(AACN\)](#) introduces a FREE Web-based tool to help nurse managers and leaders align hospital unit performance with the [AACN Standards for Establishing and Sustaining a Healthy Work Environment \(HWE\)](#).

AACN's Healthy Work Environment Team Assessment -- developed with VitalSmarts, a provider of corporate training and organizational performance products and services based in Provo, Utah -- aligns the performance of any clinical environment, from single hospital units to entire healthcare organizations, with the following six HWE standards:

- **Skilled Communication** – equal proficiency in communication and clinical skills.
- **True Collaboration** – relentless pursuit and fostering of true collaboration.

- **Effective Decision Making** – valued and committed partners in making policy, directing and evaluating clinical care and leading organizational operations.
- **Appropriate Staffing** – ensure there’s an effective match between patient needs and nurse competencies.
- **Meaningful Recognition** – for the value of work brought to the organization by oneself and others.
- **Authentic Leadership** – fully embrace the HWE imperative and engage others to achieve it.

AACN’s Healthy Work Environment Team Assessment reflects data from “Silence Kills,” a 2005 VitalSmarts-AACN study that explored avoidable errors and chronic workplace problems. The study prompted healthcare organizations to survey staff, compare performance and develop step-by-step strategies to improve poor performance, patient safety, staff recruitment and retention, and healthy workplace cultures.

Using *AACN’s Healthy Work Environment Team Assessment* team members rate online the health of their work environment. The nurse manager or leader receives aggregate scores with recommended actions and resources to improve workplace health and tracking tools to measure progress.

Connie Barden -- executive editor of the AACN Standards for Establishing and Sustaining a Healthy Work Environment – expects the HWE tool to help health professionals identify and curb conditions that cause unhealthy work environments. Barden -- RN, MSN, CCRN, CCNS, a clinical nurse specialist at Miami’s Baptist Health South Florida -- calls workplace health crucial to patient safety and staff morale.

“Compelling evidence shows the domino effect that a toxic work environment can have on patients and staff,” she explains. “Now an evidence-based screening tool is available to help nurses make their units and hospitals healthier and safer for patients and staff.”

To access the AACN Healthy Work Environment Team Assessment, visit www.hweteamtool.org.

About the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses

Founded in 1969 and based in Aliso Viejo, Calif., the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN) is the largest specialty nursing organization in the world. AACN joins together the interests of more than 500,000 acute and critical care nurses with more than 230 chapters worldwide. The organization's vision is to create a healthcare system driven by the needs of patients and their families in which acute and critical care nurses can make their optimal contribution. To learn more about AACN, visit www.aacn.org.

About VitalSmarts

An innovator in corporate training and organizational performance, VitalSmarts is home to award-winning training products that deliver powerful tools for enriching relationships and improving end results. The company also has three *New York Times* best selling books, *Crucial Conversations*, *Crucial Confrontations*, and *Influencer*. VitalSmarts has been listed five times on the *Inc.* 500 list of fastest growing companies and has taught more than two million people worldwide. www.vitalsmarts.com.

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AACN Healthy Work Environments Issues Brief

To be effective, nurse managers and leaders must be as skilled at communicating, collaborating and motivating team members as they are at clinical practice.

Toxic work environments create hazards for patients and their families, and stress for nurses, increasing the risk of medical errors and leading to higher staff turnover. Consider these everyday scenarios:

- A nurse, intimidated by an abusive physician, decides not to call a physician and double check a patient's prescription. As a result, the patient receives a fatal dose of the wrong medication.
- On a busy weekend, family members become frustrated when a loved one doesn't receive needed attention because backup staff isn't available.
- Leaders, unprepared for management, become frustrated or withdraw from dealing with complex employee decisions. Turnover increases as employees become resentful and angry because managers seem unresponsive to their concerns.

These situations point to bad communication. Counseling to improve communication skills is a low-priority budget item despite evidence that indicates poor work relationships contribute to medical errors, hospital-acquired infections, patient readmissions and a deepening nursing shortage. Unresolved issues also contribute to poor management decisions and tense staff members who feel unappreciated.

The American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN) began examining factors that contribute to medical errors, staffing problems and poor delivery of care in 2001. In 2005, AACN unveiled [*Silence Kills*](#), a study that showed taking actions before problems occur could prevent 195,000 deaths caused by medical errors each year in U.S. The study validated the need for healthy communication within clinical environments.

That same year, the association promulgated the AACN Standards for Establishing and Sustaining Healthy Work Environments (HWE): A Journey to Excellence. The six HWE standards include skilled communication, true collaboration, effective decision-making, appropriate staffing, meaningful recognition and authentic leadership.

In 2006, AACN and VitalSmarts -- a provider of corporate training and organizational performance products and services in Provo, Utah -- developed a public awareness campaign based on the [*Silence Kills*](#) study to encourage health professionals to save lives by speaking out for patients even if that means pointing out a colleague's mistakes. Recognizing the need for a convenient tool to help hospitals improve the work and care environment and encourage clinical access to the HWE standards, AACN and VitalSmarts launched a FREE Web-based assessment tool in 2009.

AACN Healthy Work Environments Team Assessment enables health professionals in any clinical setting, from a single hospital unit to entire organizations, to align performance with the six HWE standards. The online tool provides analysis of how clinical teams perceive the health of their work environment, a guide to resources to improve their work environment and tracking tools to measure progress.

AACN's assessment tool provides data to help nurse managers and leaders develop a culture of respect and accountability and make optimal nurse-patient assignments. It also helps hospitals make nurses feel valued and appreciated. The assessment tool enables health professionals to create an environment where patients feel safe and employees feel respected by identifying areas that need improvement.

AACN and VitalSmarts show their unyielding commitment to healthy work environments by making this valuable screening tool available at no charge. To access the AACN Healthy Work Environment Team Assessment, visit www.hweteamtool.org.

AACN Healthy Work Environments Fact Sheet

The link between healthy work environments (HWE) and patient safety, nurse retention and recruitment and thus, the bottom line, can't be denied. Mounting evidence suggests that toxic work environments contribute to medical errors, ineffectual care delivery, conflict and stress. Establishing and sustaining HWEs allows health professionals to make their optimal contributions to the care of patients and their families.

The American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN) and VitalSmarts -- a provider of corporate training and organizational performance products and services based in Provo, Utah -- developed a FREE Web-based screening tool to help nurses establish and maintain a healthy work environment in any clinical setting, from single hospital units to entire organizations.

- *AACN Healthy Work Environments Team Assessment* enables hospitals to put in place systems to improve the delivery of quality care, increase nurse recruitment and retention and reduce medical error. The online screening tool allows healthcare teams to align their performance with the AACN Standards for Establishing and Sustaining a Healthy Work Environment (HWE). The six HWE standards include skilled communication, true collaboration, effective decision making, appropriate staffing, meaningful recognition and authentic leadership.
- *AACN Healthy Work Environments Team Assessment* provides a mechanism to survey staff, compare performance and develop step-by-step strategies to improve poor performing areas, patient safety, staff recruitment and retention and create a respectful, healthy workplace.
- *AACN's Healthy Work Environment Standards and Team Assessment* are a response to data from the 2005 AACN-VitalSmarts study, "Silence Kills," which explored

avoidable errors and chronic workplace problems and validated the need for healthy communication within clinical environments. For more information visit www.silencekills.com.

- AACN and VitalSmarts show their unyielding commitment to healthy work environments by making this valuable screening tool available at no charge. To access the FREE *AACN Healthy Work Environments Team Assessment* visit www.hweteamtool.org or call 949-362-2050 for more information.

AACN Healthy Work Environments Initiative Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why are healthy work environments important?

A: Mounting evidence suggests that toxic work environments contribute to medical errors, ineffectual care delivery, conflict and stress. Establishing and sustaining a healthy work environment (HWE) allows health professionals to ensure that patients and their families receive the care they need. The link between HWEs and patient safety, nurse retention and recruitment and thus, the bottom line, can't be denied.

Q: Why does the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN) encourage development of an HWE?

A: AACN strives to create a healthcare system driven by the needs of patients and their families in which high acuity and critical care nurses can make optimal contributions to care. AACN understands that reducing medical errors and reversing a deepening nursing shortage depends on hospital initiatives that support HWEs.

Q: When did AACN begin looking at this issue?

A: In 2005, the association promulgated the AACN Standards for Establishing and Sustaining Healthy Work Environments (HWE): A Journey to Excellence. In January 2005, AACN and VitalSmarts -- a provider of corporate training and organizational performance products and services based in Provo, Utah -- unveiled a study that explored avoidable errors and chronic workplace problems. The study showed that taking actions before problems occur could prevent 195,000 deaths that result from medical errors each year in U.S.

The [*Silence Kills*](#) study validated the need for healthy communication within clinical environments. In 2006, AACN and VitalSmarts created a campaign to encourage nurses to save their patients lives by advocating on their behalf even if it means pointing out colleagues' mistakes. In 2009, both organizations developed *AACN Healthy Work Environments Team Assessment* to enable teams to align their performance with the six HWE standards.

Q: What does the *Healthy Work Environment Team Assessment* screen for?

A: The FREE Web-based tool allows healthcare teams to align the performance of any clinical environment, from individual units to entire organizations, with the AACN Standards for Establishing and Sustaining a Healthy Work Environment (HWE). AACN's six HWE standards include skilled communication, true collaboration, effective decision making, appropriate staffing, meaningful recognition and authentic leadership. The FREE tool offers an

analysis of how clinical teams perceive the health of their work environment, a guide to resources to improve workplace health and tracking tools to measure progress.

Q: How can health professionals make the workplace healthier?

By analyzing workplace relationships, health professionals can put in place systems that halt treatment-related harm to patients and slow erosion to a hospital's bottom line. Improving workplace relationships creates a harmonious and productive environment, one that optimizes delivery of quality care and nurse retention and reduces medical errors.

AACN and VitalSmarts show their unyielding commitment to healthy work environments by making this valuable screening tool available at no charge. To access the FREE *AACN Healthy Work Environments Team Assessment* visit www.hweteamtool.org or call 949-362-2050 for more information.