Bullying in the Workplace: It Harms More Than the Bullied

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- PhD, New York University
  - Topic: Moral distress and burnout related to job characteristics in critical care nurses
- Key contributor
  - AACN’s Healthy Work Environments (HWE) initiative
- Speaker: HWE standards and disruptive/aggressive workplace behavior.
Webinar Goals

- Recognize both subtle and blatant forms of bullying
- Identify bullying in your own behavior and that of others
- Share the recommended tactics to end bullying with colleagues
- Collaborate to implement these tactics in your work place

Session Topics

- Bullying and health of the work environment
- Bullying defined
- Who are the bullies?
- Reasons for bullying
- Impact on patients, families, and nurses
- Recommendations for alleviating bullying
Bullying and the Health of the Work Environment
AACN’s Model for Creating a Healthy Work Environment
Flawed Communication is Central to Bullying

Gaps in communication negatively impact:

- Ability to:
  - Collaborate
  - Make effective decisions
- Patient safety/outcomes
- Families

*Failure to recognize subtle acts of bullying is dangerous!*
Polling Question 1

How often are you or your colleagues bullied during a typical week?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Frequently
Polling Question 2

How often do you bully others during a typical week?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Frequently
Defining Bullying
Bullying Defined

**Any** nonverbal, verbal, or physical behavior that diminishes another person's needs, concerns, or contributions.

Behavior that

- Extinguishes communication and creativity
- Creates communication gaps that place patients in jeopardy
Continuum of Incivility:
Subtle to Blatant Behaviors

- Blatant (Physical)
- Threatening
- Shouting
- Coercing
- Intimidating
- Personal slur
- Blaming
- Violating confidences
- Gossiping
- Sarcasm
- Eye-rolling
- Isolating
- Ignoring

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Who Are the Bullies?
Bullies at All Levels of the Organization

Staff to Staff

Manager to Staff

Physician to Staff
Types of Bullying

Staff to Staff

- Criticizing
- Gossiping
- Blaming
- Being sarcastic
- Ignoring colleagues who are struggling
- Withholding information
- Refusing to work with others, isolating
- Assigning work unfairly (imbalanced)
- Not supporting a new (or old) employee
Types of Bullying

Manager to Staff

- Making unfair schedules
- Ignoring or minimizing concerns
- Failing to:
  - Respect employee confidentiality
  - Acknowledge a toxic environment
  - Address bullying

*Contributing to the problem, rather than solving it.*
### Types of Bullying

#### Physician to Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overt behaviors</th>
<th>Covert behaviors</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Failing to respect nursing contributions</td>
<td>▪ Gossiping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Being sarcastic</td>
<td>▪ Ignoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Using a demeaning tone/shouting</td>
<td>▪ Requesting a different nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Acting impatient</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Making threats</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Harassing</td>
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<td>▪ Exploiting</td>
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</table>
Reasons for Bullying
Reasons for Bullying

1. Job stress
2. Socialization
3. Role of seniority
4. Excusing, rationalizing, accepting
Reasons for Bullying

Job Stress

Pressures of the clinical environment

- Enormity of responsibility
- External expectations/demands
- Poor staffing
- Diseasfranchising work practices
  - Lunch break rules
  - Time on task
  - Work shift not over until tasks are done
Reasons for Bullying

Socialization

Clique formation
- Provides safe haven for a subgroup
- Serves as a power base
- Marginalizes those outside the clique

Multigenerational workforce
- Different approaches to work
- No right or wrong – all are unique, valuable perspectives
Reasons for Bullying

Role of Seniority

- Senior staff control work environment
  - They repeat behaviors they experienced
- Scheduling practices favor seniority
Reasons for Bullying

**Excusing, Rationalizing, Accepting**

**Distancing from one’s own bad behavior**
- Justifying the behavior
- Minimizing or excusing it
  - Claiming behavior caused by events “beyond my control”

**Normalizing bad behavior**
- Excusing someone else’s behavior
- “Passion” as a rationale for uncivil behavior when advocating for patients/families

Leads to desensitization

Bullying becomes embedded in the environment when bullies are not held accountable
Study – Recognizing Bullying

All 227 participants witnessed and/or experienced bullying

>70% of participants noted:
- Backstabbing
- Failure to respect privacy
- Nonverbal negative behaviors
- Bickering

30% demonstrated these behaviors themselves

During the interview, participants admitted “getting caught up in the moment”
Impact of Bullying
Impact of Bullying

Patient Safety and Outcomes Compromised

Flawed communication puts patients at risk!
- Lack of collaboration
- Delays in care
- Increased lengths of stay
- Improper use of resources
- Increased patient suffering

Potential to violate basic safety practices, such as failing to:
- Take prescribed time outs
- Inform intraprofessional team of status changes
- Adhere to best evidence bundles
  - Increased cost of healthcare-associated infections

AACN Critical Care Webinar Series

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Impact of Bullying

Leads to Toxic Environment

- Dysfunctional teams
- Increased turnover
- Psychological burden
- Economic burden

$22-$67K Loss of 1 nurse within 6-12 months

60% New nurses that leave in first 6 months

Decreased productivity while onboarding new nurse


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Impact of Bullying

Leads to Toxic Environment (cont)

- Increased sick time
- Negative impact on reputation of organization
- Decreased patient and staff satisfaction

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**Study: Workplace Bullying - Concerns for Nurse Leaders**

- **249 ED nurses**
- **27%** respondents experience bullying in prior 6 months
- Bullied respondents **3x** more likely to leave position

![Sources of bullying chart](chart.png)


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Study: Impact of Horizontal Hostility

511 new nurses (1-3 years of experience)

#1 behavior: Unmanageable workload

Bullying has greater effect on intent to leave than any other variable.

Impact of Bullying

Personal Impact

- Strained social relationships
- Silence leading to moral distress
- Burnout
  - Emotional exhaustion
  - Disengagement
  - Decrease in personal accomplishment
- Somatic complaints
- Depression and anxiety
- Substance abuse
Polling Question 3

How often are you or your colleagues bullied during a typical week?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Frequently
Polling Question 4

How often do you bully others during a typical week?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Frequently
How You Can Make A Difference
Name It

- Call out the elephant in the room
  - Use the term **bullying**
- Recognize bullying for what it is
- Have courage – speak up
  - Don’t assume bad intentions
- Examine your own behavior – are you a bully?
- Educate and influence others
- Model the behavior you expect of others

What **one** thing can you do now?
## DESC Model for Conflict Resolution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td><strong>Describe</strong> the situation (facts, not judgments)</td>
<td><em>Yesterday, in front of a patient, you rolled your eyes and walked away</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td><strong>Express</strong> your feelings</td>
<td><em>I felt embarrassed and demeaned</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td><strong>Specify/suggest</strong> an alternative behavior</td>
<td><em>When you disagree with me in the future, please speak with me privately</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td><strong>State the positive consequences</strong> (and negative, if appropriate)</td>
<td><em>That way we can both get our needs met.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategies for Unit Leadership

Up to 13% of management time is spent on managing incivility.

Support a caring, respectful culture
- Model the behavior you expect of others
- Coach reticent staff in assertiveness skills
- Develop personal competence in holding crucial conversations
- Regularly address issues that negatively impact morale
- Apply organizational policies consistently and fairly to ensure a culture intolerant of bullying
Organizational Strategies for Senior Leadership

An organization’s culture starts at the top

Develop leaders able to:
- Create a safe haven for healthy communication, stress management, and conflict resolution
- Commit to creating a culture of respect
- Assess organizational culture infrastructure frequently
  - Shared governance
  - Magnet/Pathway to Excellence/Beacon
  - Policies that embody organizational values
    - Code of conduct
    - Zero tolerance
Summary

Change Must Occur from Boardroom to Bedside

1. Recognize bullying in your workplace
2. Call out the elephant in the room
3. Develop personal courage
4. Speak up – use “I” messages and DESC
5. Share HWE resources
6. Be part of the culture change
Access AACN’s Healthy Work Environment Resources

- AACN’s Healthy Work Environment Standards and Assessment Tool
- Implementation systems and tool kits
- Journal articles
- Books
- Pocket cards
- Guidelines
- Studies (particularly “Silence Kills”)
- Vital Smarts resources
- Take the Beacon Journey

Find these resources on the HWE Resources page at www.aacn.org.
AACN Tools/Resources Specifically for Bullying

- Bullying Presentation Slides
- A Gap Analysis for a Bully-free Workplace
- Clark Workplace Civility Index®
- DESC Model of Assertive Behavior

Find these resources on the Bullying webinar information page at www.aacn.org.
Alleviate Bullying Behavior Now—

1. Download the **Tools and Resources.**
   Access them from the Bullying webinar information page at [www.aacn.org](http://www.aacn.org).

2. **Discuss** the tools and recommended practices with your colleagues.

3. **Implement practices** that are suitable for your unit.