What is Nurse-to-Nurse Hostility?

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It is the persistent downgrading experienced from your peer(s) that eventually undermines your confidence and self esteem. It is a serious problem in nursing due to increased tasks and job pressures, decreased time together and a history of powerlessness – but the biggest problem is that the damage from these behaviors is invisible. Nurse-to-nurse hostility prevents us from coming together to face our current challenges and threatens our profession on every level.

OVERT: Name calling, bickering, fault-finding, back-stabbing, criticism, intimidation, gossip, blaming, raised eyebrows, shouting, using put-downs, etc.

COVERT: Unfair assignments, sarcasm, eye-rolling, ignoring, refusing to help, sighing, whining, refusing to work with someone, isolation, sabotage, exclusion.

EFFECTS: Feelings of decreased self esteem, anxiety, fear, guilt and anger, vulnerability, loss of confidence, humiliation, stress-related illnesses, a profound sense of isolation and an impaired ability to perform cognitive tasks.

SOLUTIONS

At an individual level:
- Confront the aggressor. Check out any situation that causes you worry by directly speaking to the aggressor in private. Begin with the details; then share the impact.
- Never be a silent witness: never stand by and listen as one co-worker slams or talks negatively about another co-worker. Role model collegiality at all times.
- If it continues: keep a log of incidents, ask for help from your manager or human resources, make a formal written complaint and as a last resort, take legal action.

At a unit level:
- Adopt a unit philosophy that clearly states that these behaviors are not acceptable and will not be tolerated. Seek nursing leadership support and report these behaviors.
- Educate staff about hostility (call it what it is). Then seek education classes on assertive communication such as Pull Conversation from Juice or the DESC model (see below).

At an organizational level:
- Adopt a zero tolerance policy and hold all staff accountable all the time. NO Exceptions!
- Take complaints seriously and follow up in a timely manner.
- Create a system for reporting, monitoring and feedback.
- Embrace transformational leadership: take a stand, inspire and have a positive vision.

IN THE END, we all want the same thing: to come to work and be recognized, valued, and appreciated for the talents and skills that we alone bring to our team; to enjoy our work and take care of our patients with skill and care, and feel confident and proud to be a NURSE!

DESC Model

D: Describe the behavior (facts first)
E: Explain the impact of the behavior (story second)
S: State the desired outcome (check for understanding)
C: Consequences will help get your peer’s attention OR

D: When...
E: I feel...
S: Therefore, I want
C: So that...

End with a question such as: Would you be willing to do that?