

Bullying in Healthcare: A Silent Threat to Staff and Patients

Since elementary school, bullying has been a key source of stress and anxiety in people across the world. As school-aged kids grow into working adults, conversations regarding bullying often cease, implying that it should no longer be an issue. Unfortunately, negative behaviors continue across the lifespan, resulting in detrimental physical and mental effects on victims of such aggression. Healthcare professionals are not exempt from bullying; in fact, these employees are most often targeted. Workplace bullying is a significant source of stress for many of today's adult population.

From Verbal Abuse to Assault: The Dark Side of Healthcare

Workplace violence is any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening disruptive behavior that occurs at the work site. This bullying can take the form of threats, verbal abuse, physical assault, and even go as far as homicide. OSHA states, "Acts of violence and other injuries are currently the third-leading cause of fatal occupational injuries in the United States. Workplace bullying can ultimately lead to negative effects on the patient.

When bullying happens in the emergency department or the operating room, it poses an immediate threat to the patient. Most likely, the nurse or other healthcare worker who was just bullied is now agitated and or nervous and will underperform because of anxiety." An OSHA report indicates that 21 percent of registered nurses or nursing students said they have been physically assaulted, and more than 50 percent said they have been verbally abused, a form of workplace violence that includes bullying. This leads to an elevated staff turnover in the healthcare organization, which again directly affects patient care.

The Chain Reaction: Bullying's Impact on Patient Care

Workplace bullying can take on various forms. Lateral violence is a common occurrence in the healthcare industry. This kind of violence is pervasive in the nursing workplace and has profound psychosocial, physical, safety, and financial consequences for nurses, their patients, and overall healthcare organizations. It tends to manifest when two people who are both victims of a situation of dominance turn on each other rather than challenge the system that oppressed them both. Healthcare organizations can reduce the risk of workplace violence by implementing a zero-tolerance policy.

These policies would not only include all employees but clients and visitors as well. A good resource to use for implementing a set of guidelines is to go to OSHA's website and look at their guide for preventing workplace violence for healthcare and social service workers. Once the healthcare organization has its "program" in place, it's critical to ensure all employees know the policy and understand that all incidents that happen within the workplace will be explored and remedied immediately.

Bullying within healthcare organizations is extremely common, and the effects it has on the staff impacts the quality of care given. When nurses, doctors, and clinical staff are subjects of bullying, their motivation, energy level, and morale drop. This results in direct decreased job satisfaction as well as increased psychological and physiological effects. By creating a kind and

welcoming environment, healthcare professionals will feel valued and appreciated, causing a chain reaction that will ensure that every patient receives the most genuine care possible.

References

Anderson, M., & Smith, L. (2020). *Bullying from Childhood to Adulthood: A Comprehensive Analysis*. New York: Academic Press.