

Bullying in nursing

[Sociology](#), [Bullying](#)



BullyingInNursingCassandra Owens Recently, during one of our weekend shifts, the unit was almost to capacity with each nurse having the max number of patients we were allowed to have. Our sister unit is the unit that gets our over flow once we are no longer able to accept any more patients. The charge nurse was a young Army Lieutenant and new to being a charge nurse. When the nursing supervisor called to notify us of another admission, the charge nurse informed her that although we were able to accept two more patients, our sister unit only had five patients.

She then asked if the other patients could be directed to the other unit. The supervisor proceeded to yell at her so loud over the phone that we could hear it, stating she would take any admission she directed towards her. Just because she was a new Lieutenant it would behoove her to mind her own floor. Our head nurse was notified and she spoke with the supervisor, but the damage had been done. The nurse is now very hesitant when she has to be charge and tries to change shifts so she will not have to do it.

Bullying has been receiving a mass amount of attention due to recent horrible acts that have been committed against individuals who are considered helpless and/or weak. From psychological damage to physical harm or even death, bullying is a phenomenon that can be damaging to an individual, group or community. This fact holds true on the professional side as well. Bullying in the nursing profession has been increasingly reported over the past decade. Although bullying behaviors are unfortunately common acts committed by physicians, patients, and patient's families, nurses also engage in bullying of their colleagues.

With this recent increase, it is important to understand the ethical and legal issues associated with this behavior. Considering that the nursing profession has topped the list of the most honest and ethical professions for eleven years in a row, it is concerning that nurses would engage in behaviors that have been described as humiliating, intimidating, threatening, or demeaning aimed at their own colleagues (Matt, 2012). There are detailed codes of ethics in place that are supposed to provide guidelines for moral character. Yet, despite these guidelines, nurses engage in the aforementioned behaviors targeting their subordinates and peers. What Is Bullying/Workplace Bullying? Bullying is known by many names; aggression, incivility, mobbing, horizontal or lateral violence and intimidation are some of the synonyms that are associated with the term (Murray, 2009). Workplace bullying is a serious issue affecting the nursing profession. It is defined as any type of repetitive abuse in which the victim of bullying behavior suffers verbal abuse, threats or behaviors by the perpetrator that interfere with his or her job performance (Murray, 2009).

Often, workplace bullying involves abuse and/or misuse of power and authority within an organization. Bullying behaviors create feelings of defenselessness in the victim and significantly demoralize his or her right to dignity in the workplace (Murray, 2009). Looking back at the example in the introduction, after the nurse spoke with others who have been in charge and had to deal with the supervisor, it was found that many of the other nurses were treated the same way. The supervisor only spoke and behaved that way to nurses who were new to the charge nurse position.

As it is a requirement for military nurses to act as charge nurse in order to get leadership experience, the supervisor liked to target the newer nurses because she could intimidate them. Nursing leaders must be able to work with others to achieve common goals and be able to assess and develop new opportunities for nurses (Finkelman, 2012). This supervisor creates such a hostile and uncomfortable environment the nurses were hesitant to approach her for any type of guidance for fear of being belittled.

Ethical and Legal Considerations

There are several ethical principals, virtues of moral character and codes that are violated by nurses who engage in bullying behaviors. One principal is nonmaleficence, which is defined as requiring one to not engage in infliction of evil or harm on another (Matt, 2012). Since bullying behaviors have the specific intent of humiliating and demeaning another, nurses who bully others violate this principle. Justice is another principle that has many descriptions, but the most basic is fair treatment of all. All workers have a right to a safe and healthy work environment thus bullying behaviors violate the principle of justice.

Bullying behavior also violate moral virtues that are associated with nursing. Discernment is the ability to make fitting judgments and reach decisions without being unduly influenced by fears (Matt, 2012). This virtue was definitely violated by my nursing supervisor. Nurses who bully also violate the virtues of compassion, integrity, and conscience; all characteristics that show the nurse demonstrate weak moral character as well as weak Christian values and characteristics. There are two ethical codes that are violated by nurses who participate in bullying behaviors.

The first is the International Council of Nurses (ICN) Code of Ethics for Nurses (Matt, 2012). There are many elements that the code addresses, but when pertain to bullying, the code that is violated pertains to nurses and coworkers. It states that, “ the nurse sustains a cooperative relationship with coworkers in nursing and other fields” (Matt, 2012). Of course, the ANA Code of ethics is violated; specifically provision six which states that, “ the nurse participates in establishing, maintaining and improving healthcare environments and conditions of employment... through individual and collective action” (Finkelman, 2012).

Bullying behaviors once again defeat these purposes. Although there are currently no laws in the US specifically targeting workplace bullying, as of May 2011, 16 bills addressing the issue were active in 11 states (The Healthy Workplace Campaign) (Matt, 2012). Violations are also addressed under the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA). Violations of these regulations may result in citations and penalties ranging from temporary closure of a business to fines up to \$70, 000 per incident if an employer willfully or repeatedly violates the requirements (Matt, 2012).

Not only is the employer subject to legal consequences, but the nurse who does the bullying can and will be held accountable as well. No one should be subjected to this type of difficulty while at work. Conclusion Healthcare leaders have a responsibility to employees and the public to provide work environments that are free from abuse and harassment. When workplace bullying has been identified it is up to leaders to take appropriate action to ensure the abuse stops, the person is held accountable and steps are taken to ensure it does not happen again.

Bullying not only affects the healthcare providers who are being targeted, but it affects the healthcare organizations as well. It is reported that bullying in the workplace can cost over \$4 billion a year (Murray, 2009). It contributes to increased work dissatisfaction, absence from work and work-related injuries. Hospital administrators, human resource managers and nurse managers must educate themselves to ensure they have a clear understanding of their own responsibilities for providing a safe work environment. Individual nurses must educate themselves as well and not stand for bullying nor participate in bullying behavior.

I believe nursing is a blessing and a gift from God; an artistic ability that not everyone is capable of doing. When a person decides to that advantage of this gift and blessing, it is disrespectful to the characteristics of God, which, if studied closely, are directly aligned with the virtues of nursing. I feel the following verses are direct words from God that hold us accountable for our behavior when it comes to nursing and taking care of others, be it our patients or our coworkers: 1 John 3: 17 “ But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? ; Philippians 2: 4 “ do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. ”; and Galatians 6: 10 “ So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. ” (Society, 1999). How can we say we love God, yet do our fellow man wrong? We have to take a close look in the mirror daily and seek God’s guidance to direct our paths, because if what we do is not pleasing to God, it’s all being done in vain. References Finkelman, A. 2012). Leadership and management

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