Overcoming Incivility Before Graduation

There is nothing more exciting than your first day of clinical as a student nurse. Clinical is the best experience in nursing school, but one thing you aren’t prepared for is dealing with nurses that are not accepting of students. The saying, “nurses eat their young,” is a very real and difficult thing to deal with. It wasn’t until my last day of clinical that I actually experienced incivility.

I spent my first few weeks with nurses who were helpful and gave me constructive criticism. My last day was much different than any of the other days. The nurse I was assigned to wanted nothing to do with a student. I tried to ask questions but every time I did she would let out a loud sigh. I still went about my day and tried to do as much as I could for her without feeling in her way. Towards the end of the end of shift I was ready to hear some feedback from her. The nurse told me, “I don’t think you have the heart to be a nurse and won’t ever get hired.” I was completely flabbergasted. I asked her to clarify what I could do to be better so I know for future reference. She said it was just her opinion about me and didn’t offer anything constructive for me to take back. There was nothing I could do at that moment but I pushed through the rest of the shift with a smile on my face. I left the hospital feeling defeated. But I knew this nurse was wrong, I love helping people and being able to make a difference. It was at the moment I knew I had experienced being bullied.

Incivility has been described as rude, intimidating and undesirable behaviors that are directed towards another person (Crystal Tillman Harris, 2011). Incivility doesn’t just affect a nurse on a personal level; it effects the whole workplace
environment. Bullying affects the nurses confidence, which eventually affects the patients safety. It also leads to nurses feeling burnt out quickly and feelings of depression when it comes to work. “According to Banishing Burnout by M. Leiter and C. Maslach (2005), the annual cost of job stress alone due to incivility at US corporations is $300 billion.” (Harris, 2011). The American Nurses Association reported 53% of student nurses reported being put down by a staff nurse (American Nurses Association, 2011). Those statistics are terrifying. If half of our student nurses are reporting feeling incivility by a staff nurse then we can assume that those students are also feeling discouraged and possibly even feelings of being burnt out, all before they are licensed. “When student nurses are subjected to bullying by nurses in practice, they are more apt to emulate the behaviors and engage in bullying activities themselves.” (Harris, 2011).

Incivility not only affects health care workers of the facility but it also affects the patients and their families. The Joint Commission suggests implementing policies and procedures that include a zero tolerance policy. This would also have to include how and when to begin disciplinary actions. The Joint Commission has taken steps to promote a safe work environment; however, much more work needs to be done. To make a lasting difference each health care worker needs to take a look at themselves.

Behaviors are better changed when fixing the root of the problem. 53% of student nurses feel incivility before they graduate, which means these students are more likely to emulate the incivility they experienced as a student, thus resulting in a circle of violence (American Nurses Association, 2011). It is the responsibility of
all health care workers to break this circle. Ways to break it include modeling the professional behavior that is expected by nurses. Leaders in the facilities can promote a safe environment by offering training in conflict resolution, as well as encouraging inter-professional communication. (The Joint Commission, 2008)

According to Harris 2011, “It is when nurse care enough about themselves and their patients to confront uncivil behavior face-to-face immediately, directly and respectfully to foster mutual respect.” Nurses by nature are a very caring group of people. Nurses have the utmost respect for their patients. We should also be able to apply that same respect to other nurses and faculty. Being part of this profession includes implementing universal standards for conduct and respect for our fellow professionals. It is time for nurses to advocate for nurses. We can advocate for a change for what is considered acceptable treatment. Nurses make a difference everyday in patient’s lives; it is time nurses make a difference in the workplace.
References:


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