

# CENTER *for* American Nurses

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## Lateral Violence and Bullying in Nursing

### Background

Lateral violence and bullying are overt or covert acts of verbal or nonverbal aggression. Lateral violence refers to acts that occur between nursing colleagues, and bullying is described as acts perpetrated by one in a higher level of authority. Students, newly graduated nurses, and experienced staff all can be victims. Examples of these behaviors include undermining activities, sabotage, scapegoating, infighting, backstabbing, and withholding information (Griffin, 2004).

### How Widespread Are Lateral Violence and Bullying in Healthcare?

- A total of 38% of healthcare workers have reported incidents of one or more types of bullying (Quine, 1999); 48% have reported experiences of verbal abuse (Institute for Safe Medication Practices, 2004).
- Workers who experience bullying have significantly lower levels of job satisfaction, increased job-induced stress, and a greater intent to leave a position (Quine, 1999).
- A study of student nurses reported that 53% had been put down by a staff nurse (Longo, 2007).
- Nursing students are able to identify bullying attitudes in nurses (Randle, 2003).

### What Is the Impact of Lateral Violence and Bullying in Nursing?

- Nurses can experience physical symptoms such as frequent headaches, gastrointestinal problems, sleep disturbances, and fatigue (MacIntosh, 2005).
- Psychological symptoms such as fear, depression, sadness, anxiety, nervousness, and mistrust have been reported (McKenna, Smith, Poole, & Coverdale, 2003).
- Additional adverse outcomes have included poor morale, decreased productivity, and increased errors (Sofield & Salmond, 2003).
- Nurses have identified intra-staff aggression as the most upsetting form of aggression (Farrell, 1997).
- Newly licensed nurses have reported that they feel undervalued, and that their learning opportunities have been hindered (McKenna, Smith, Poole, & Coverdale, 2003).

### Solutions

- Education on the dangers of lateral violence and bullying
- Education on ways to implement strategies designed to reduce lateral violence and bullying
- Adoption of zero tolerance policies regarding lateral violence and bullying

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*The Center for American Nurses is a professional association whose mission is to create healthy work environments through advocacy, education and research.*



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Continued from previous page.

### CENTER RESOURCES

Center for American Nurses (2007). *Bullying in the workplace: Reversing a culture*. Silver Spring, MD: Center for American Nurses.

Center for American Nurses (2008). *Position statement: Lateral violence and bullying in the workplace*. Retrieved February 25, 2008, from <http://www.centerforamericannurses.org/positions/lateralviolence.pdf>

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Griffin, M. (2004). Teaching cognitive rehearsal as a shield for lateral violence: An intervention for newly licensed nurses. *The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing*, 35, 257–263.

Institute for Safe Medication Practices. (March 11, 2004). Intimidation: Practitioners speak up about this unresolved problem (Part I). Retrieved January 9, 2006, from [http://www.ismp.org/Newsletters/acutecare/articles/20040311\\_2.asp](http://www.ismp.org/Newsletters/acutecare/articles/20040311_2.asp)

Longo, J. (2007). Horizontal violence among nursing students. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, 21, 177–178.

MacIntosh, J. (2005). Experiences of workplace bullying in a rural area. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 26, 893–910.

McKenna, B., Smith, N., Poole, S., & Coverdale, J. H. (2003). Horizontal violence: Experiences of registered nurses in their first year of practice. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 42, 90–96.

Quine, L. (1999). Workplace bullying in NHS community trust: Staff questionnaire survey. *BMJ.com*, 318, 228–232. Retrieved February 26, 2008, from <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/318/7178/228>

Randle, J (2003). Bullying in the nursing profession. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 43, 395–401.

Sofield, L., & Salmond, S. W. (2003). Workplace violence: A focus on verbal abuse and intent to leave the organization. *Orthopaedic Nursing*, 22(4), 274–283.

### SELECTED WEB RESOURCES

The Workplace Bullying Institute  
[www.bullyinginstitute.org](http://www.bullyinginstitute.org)

Bully Busters  
[www.bullyinginstitute.org](http://www.bullyinginstitute.org)

