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 Widely 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 polices regarding lateral violence and bullying

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**CENTER RESOURCES**

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


**REFERENCES**


**SELECTED WEB RESOURCES**

The Workplace Bullying Institute
www.bullyinginstitute.org

Bully Busters
www.bullyinginstitute.org