

- Training supervisors and managers on the code of conduct, effective conflict resolution and managing in a respectful manner;
- Training all physicians and employees on the code of conduct;
- Creating more opportunities for teamwork and collaboration in units and departments; and
- Addressing staffing and shift scheduling to reduce strain.

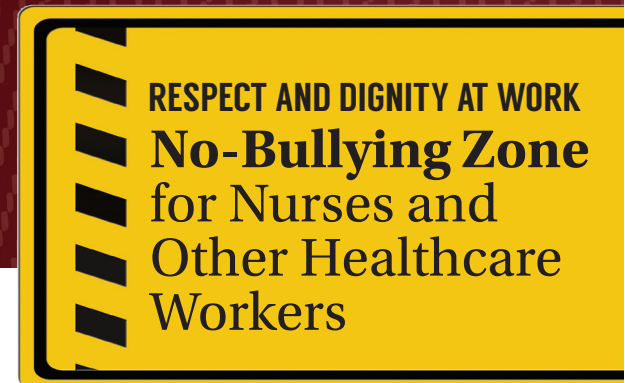
IN THE MEANTIME, IF YOU'RE BEING BULLIED AT WORK...

Contact your union. You have the right to respect and dignity at work. Seek support from your personal healthcare provider, co-workers and/or a trusted employee assistance program. Keep a written log of bullying incidents with dates and times and make note of any associated health symptoms or illnesses.

Avoid being alone with the bully or confronting the person on your own. Stay calm and do not argue with the bully. Your union or steward can help assess the situation and give advice on how your contract can be used to stop the abuse.

Remember, if you are being bullied, you are probably not alone. Encourage other colleagues and co-workers who are being bullied to contact the union, too.

For more information, contact the
AFT health and safety team at
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RECLAIMING THE PROMISE
OF HIGH-QUALITY HEALTHCARE



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Healthcare settings place heavy demands and stress on nurses and other healthcare professionals. The work of caring for the sick and vulnerable requires dedication and resilience. Most healthcare workers rise to the task and provide excellent care, but they often do it in an environment that is not supportive of their effort. According to a number of studies, 40-77 percent of nurses report being bullied at work, making nurses twice as likely as other U.S. workers to be bullied on the job.

Why workplace bullying is so prevalent in healthcare settings is not entirely clear, but some research lays the blame in part on the hierarchical culture of hospitals and other healthcare settings. For instance, most nurses operate under a “double” structure of supervision, with nurse supervisors and physicians. And most nurse managers traditionally have little or no training on creating a civil and respectful work environment. They may not recognize their own bullying behavior or that of others they manage.

WHAT IS WORKPLACE BULLYING?

Workplace bullying is quite simply an abuse or misuse of power. It is behavior that intimidates, degrades or offends a person, often in front of others. A person who is the target of a bullying manager, supervisor or co-worker often feels defenseless and demoralized. A bullied individual may be singled out by a bully for constant criticism with no concrete or positive guidance and support for improvement.

Bullies rarely mistreat staff in isolation; they create a culture of bullying through a facility.

Typically, an environment of fear and intimidation develops that discourages trust, cooperation and teamwork— essential characteristics of a high-functioning healthcare environment. Also, bullying behavior is likely to be witnessed by colleagues, clients and patients.

Research has shown that targets of workplace bullying experience high levels of stress, much like people with post-traumatic stress disorder. Unresolved, chronic stress causes physical changes in the brain that can lead to depression and suicidal thoughts.

WHO IS MOST AT RISK IN HEALTHCARE SETTINGS?

The research is limited when it comes to bullying in healthcare facilities. Most of the research has focused on nurses, and little is known about the impact of bullying on other healthcare professionals. However, the studies that have been conducted, both in the United States and internationally, have consistently shown that those most at risk include:

- Shift workers;
- Technicians who perform monotonous tasks;
- Workers unlikely to find opportunities for promotion within their departments or units;
- New nurses who may be isolated by veteran nurses or established cliques; and
- Older nurses or healthcare professionals who are not as tech savvy as their younger colleagues.

FEW LEGAL REMEDIES, BUT THE UNION CAN HELP

Federal and state laws offer no protection against workplace bullying unless it is related to sexual harassment or racial, ethnic, religious or age discrimination. Without clear direction and boundaries, managers, supervisors and co-workers may—intentionally or not—cross the line and bully employees.

It is time we recognize the unacceptable bullying behavior taking place in healthcare facilities and the culture that permits this practice. The healthcare industry has skirted the issue by obliquely referring to such behaviors as “inappropriate management style” or “poor leadership qualities.” But let’s call it what it is—bullying—and work together to stop it.

One way we can accomplish this is by encouraging nurses and other healthcare professionals to bring their concerns to their unions.

Unions can send a clear message that management is ultimately responsible for changing the culture and putting an end to bullying behavior. Unions can also approach management about implementing evidence-based solutions to reduce the prevalence of workplace bullying, such as:

- Developing (with union input) a code of conduct that stresses every worker’s right to be treated with respect and dignity;