Defining a Healthy Work Environment

The first goal in the Strategic Plan for the Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses (AMSN) is Workplace Advocacy. AMSN will support medical-surgical nurses in meeting the increasingly complex demands of their work environment.

The Board of Directors created two objectives to accomplish this goal. One was to create ways to recognize healthy work environments in med-surg units. This will be met through the creation of the AMSN PRISM Award, a recognition award that will be rolled out later this year.

The second objective was to develop knowledge-based resources for a healthy work environment. Through the Workplace Advocacy Task Force, AMSN has established a Healthy Work Environment (HWE) section of the AMSN Web site. Many resources are pulled together in one place to help you find the information you need on hot topics like workplace bullying and lateral violence, staffing issues and strategies, and career development relationships. Many additional resources and references are listed. To get to this information on the AMSN site, go to www.amsn.org/HWE.

So what is a healthy work environment? Would you know it if you had it? Kramer, Schmalenberg, and Maguire (2008) identified eight attributes considered to be essential for a HWE in hospitals and to allow nurses to give quality patient care. These measurable attributes are always present in a HWE.

They are 1) support for education; 2) working with clinically competent nurses; 3) positive nurse/physician relationships; 4) autonomous nursing practice; 5) control over nursing practice; 6) supportive nurse managers; 7) adequacy of staffing; and 8) a culture of concern for patients. We will review each of the essentials.

Support for Education

Education can mean internships and educational seminars as well as continuing nursing education activities and degrees. An employer who supports education provides availability, financial assistance, rewards for education, and overall value of education (Kramer et al., 2008).

Working with Clinically Competent Nurses

Clinically competent nurses will have degrees, national specialty certifications, and peer reinforcement. When a nurse lacks competent co-workers, it hurts both quality patient care and job satisfaction.

Positive Nurse/Physician Relationships

A good relationship between nurses and physicians is essential for improving patient care. The work of nurses and physicians overlaps more and more, and these professionals must recognize the other is bringing an important facet of care to the table.

Autonomous Nursing Practice

A nurse must have the freedom to act on what he or she knows to provide the best patient care. Inherent in this is the need for the nurse to be knowledgeable – to know what best practice is through evidence-based practice and continuing education.

Control Over Nursing Practice

When nurses have control over their practice, they are asked for and provide feedback and input in decision-making, policies, and personnel issues. The enabling structure must be visible, viable, and supported (Kramer et al., 2008).

Supportive Nurse Managers

Nurse-managers are very involved in many levels, working with budgets, managing staff, placing patients, and more. Because of this, their role is pivotal in creating (or hindering) a HWE through each of these essentials. The nurse-manager must support his or her nurses.

Adequacy of Staffing

Kramer and colleagues (2008) reported that the perception of adequate staffing is the measurable factor in creating a HWE. Nurses must perceive that they have the support of adequate staffing to help them better perform their duties. Thus administration should confer with nurses on staffing standards.

A Culture of Concern for Patients

Shared values and beliefs must be reflected in behaviors. Each employee plays a role in communicating and reinforcing the culture. The concern is for both the patients and the nurses who care for them.

Inserted in this copy of MedSurg Matters! is a removable poster explaining the characteristics of a healthy work environment. Please use it to engage conversation in your workplace by displaying it on your unit, in your break room, rest room, or in your cafeteria.

Be sure to visit www.amsn.org/HWE to learn more about how you can help create a healthy work environment in your workplace. You have the support of AMSN with you!

Reference


Melissa Patterson is Customer Service Coordinator, Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses (AMSN), Pitman, NJ.