

HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENT

Description

According to the World Health Organization, “...every citizen of the world has the right to healthy and safe work; a right to a work environment that enables him or her to live a socially and economically productive life.”¹ Healthy work environments have both direct and indirect impacts on patient safety. Healthy work environments have been linked to increased nurse and health care worker retention, recruitment, job satisfaction and have decreased stress and burnout, which subsequently leads to safer patient practices.^{2,3,4,5} A healthy work environment is a productive and collaborative setting in which nurses and other health care workers are free from physical and psychosocial harm while maximizing their ability to provide safe, quality care, along with meeting personal needs and with the empowerment to promote a satisfying work experience.¹⁻⁹ Work environments that are negative, demoralizing and have unsafe work conditions are deemed “unhealthy” and have been correlated with unsafe patient practice, nursing shortages, nursing job dissatisfaction and low productivity.⁴⁻⁸ The achievement of a healthy work environment is multifactorial and requires the support of the health care workers through an environment of positive communication and co-worker team efforts.^{4,6,7}

ENA Position

It is the position of the Emergency Nurses Association that:

1. Leadership and health care workers share a mutual responsibility to create collaborative and communication-centered values that support a just culture, healthy work environment and personal accountability.⁸
2. Leadership is the gatekeeper for a healthy work environment through role modeling and implementation of a healthy workplace.⁵
3. Health care workers and leadership share the responsibility for respectful, professional and effective communication with zero tolerance for intimidation, abusiveness or bullying.⁷⁻⁸
4. Leadership has an obligation to identify and implement physical safety measures that guard against violent incidents and injuries.
5. It is the responsibility of the health care worker and leadership to report, investigate and provide solutions to address unsafe circumstances.⁶
6. Leadership has an obligation to identify policies, education and training and equipment needed to assure safe patient handling and prevent injury.⁷
7. Leadership makes resources and education available in the workplace for sustaining the physical and psychological needs of the health care worker such as safe staffing levels, fatigue related risks, protected meal times and opportunities to de-brief after critical events.⁹

8. Health care workers are responsible for delivering safe, high quality patient care and ensuring professional communication with patients and colleagues. Health care workers unable to function at this level are ethically responsible for their condition and the awareness of this condition in others.^{8,9}
9. Nurse researchers are challenged to continue to investigate the healthy work environment and its positive influence on patient outcomes.

Background

The unique characteristic of the emergency department lends itself to a stressful work environment, with demonstrated risks to patient safety, decreased nurse satisfaction and retention as the results. A healthy work environment is multifactorial; working on one component alone will not achieve this necessary cultural shift.^{4,7} It is a shared responsibility of the health care worker, leadership and health care organizations to create and sustain a healthy work environment.

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