

Position statement: Bullying

Purpose

The purpose of this statement is to provide information and resources for members about workplace bullying and to affirm NZNO's position that bullying is never acceptable.

Introduction

For the purpose of this statement, "workplace bullying" is defined as "unwanted, repeated behaviour that makes a person feel disrespected, unsupported and stressed" (Gilmour, 2018 p.33). NZNO's position is that bullying is never acceptable. It has a negative effect on those who experience it and will ultimately reduce the quality of nursing care that can be provided. NZNO has processes in place to prevent and address workplace bullying and has resources available for members and others to help them prevent bullying.

Find out more at: www.nzno.org.nz/bullyfree

Background

Workplace bullying includes any form of harassment which could affect NZNO members. The Health and Safety at Work Act (2015) says employers must take all reasonable steps to eliminate, isolate and minimise risks to the health and safety of workers and others. This includes bullying, because it can lead to physical, cultural, spiritual and psychological harm. Bullying thrives in demanding, over-stretched, under-staffed workplaces (Gilmour, 2018, p.33). Nurses and other health professionals have repeatedly reported bullying in health workplaces (Medical Council of New Zealand, 2009; Association of Salaried Medical Specialists, 2017; Kelsey, 2017). Health workers face a higher than average risk of experiencing workplace bullying.

Bullying may occur in the form of racist (Brunton & Cook, 2018), sexist and/or ageist Attitudes and behaviours. It may occur up and down hierarchies, and between colleagues. Health workers can also be bullied by patients, and family or whānau. A New Zealand study (D'Souza et al, 2018) also found nurses to be at a higher than average risk of cyberbullying at work.

Two recent New Zealand studies (Brunton and Cook, 2018; D'Souza et al, 2018) concluded that:

- clear communication is needed about what behaviours are acceptable and what are unacceptable;
- victims of bullying need support to share and report their experiences; and
- managers need processes and resources to help them develop healthy workplaces that are free of bullying.

NZNO's recommendations to employers

NZNO's recommendations to employers are based on the principle that NZNO members and staff should be able to work in a safe, caring environment with positive, professional relationships, and where they feel supported to have free, frank and respectful conversations.

Employers should:

1. Build respectful workplace relationships by developing and agreeing to a set of team values and a code of conduct. Make sure they align with those of the organisation.
2. Recognise and promote diversity, biculturalism, equity and inclusiveness.
3. Manage team workloads, and develop managers who are effective communicators.
4. Provide education for all team members on:
 - how bullying affects individuals and groups, and the supports and remedies available;
 - the responsibilities of witnesses to report bullying, and of managers to intervene and investigate;
 - the consequences (disciplinary action) for people who bully others; and
 - on acceptable and unacceptable behaviour for people who bully others.
5. Implement team processes for changing workplace culture that include conflict resolution, the reporting of bullying and confidential support for complainants.

NZNO recognises that bullying is not:

- issuing reasonable instructions and expecting them to be carried out;
- warning or disciplining someone in line with organisational policy and procedures;
- insisting on high standards of performance in terms of quality, safety and team cooperation;
- legitimate criticism about work performance (this should not be expressed in a hostile, harassing manner); and
- giving critical feedback, including in a performance appraisal, and requiring justified performance improvement.

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Other resources

Australian College of Nurses (2016) *Bullying in the workplace position statement*.

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Mission statement

NZNO is committed to the representation of members and the promotion of nursing and midwifery. NZNO embraces Te Tiriti o Waitangi and works to improve the health status of all peoples of Aotearoa/ New Zealand through participation in health and social policy development.

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