

Position Statement: Bullying

Purpose

The position of the New Zealand Nurses Organisation (NZNO), Tōpūtanga Tapuhi Kaitiaki O Aotearoa (NZNO) is that bullying is never acceptable. There are processes in place to prevent and address instances of bullying in workplaces. NZNO has resources that aim to prevent bullying. This position statement is the definitive statement from NZNO about the unacceptability of bullying, the negative effect it has on those who experience these behaviours, other members of the healthcare team and ultimately the effect on recipients of nursing care. For the purposes of this document 'workplace bullying' is defined as 'unwanted, repeated behaviour that makes a person feel disrespected, unsupported and stressed.' (Gilmour, 2018 p.33)

Background

Workplace bullying and harassment is a global phenomenon. NZNO members regularly report being exposed to bullying and harassment. In Aotearoa New Zealand the Health and Safety at Work Act (2015) obligates employers to take all reasonable steps to eliminate, isolate and minimise risks to the health and safety of workers and others. This includes bullying and harassment because it can lead to physical and psychological harm. 'Bullying thrives in demanding, over-stretched, under-staffed workplaces' (Gilmour, 2018 p.33). It has been repeatedly described and reported in healthcare settings by nurses and colleagues in other health professions (Medical Council of New Zealand, 2009; Association of Salaried Medical Specialists, 2017; Kelsey, 2017) all of whom are at above-average risk of experiencing workplace bullying.

There are situations where this may occur with racist, sexist and ageist attitudes and behaviours (Brunton, Cook, Walker & Clendon 2017), occurs up and down hierarchies and between colleagues. Bullies can also be care recipients and family/whānau.

D'Souza et al (2018) explored the concept of workplace *cyberbullying*, identifying nurses as being at elevated risk. Both studies conclude that:

- clear communication about acceptable and unacceptable behaviours is necessary,
- victims of bullying need support to share and report their experiences and
- managers need processes and resources to facilitate the development of healthy workplaces and to prevent and address bullying .



NZNO Recommendations

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

1. Build respectful workplace relationships by developing and agreeing a set of team values and a code of conduct that align with those of the organisation.
2. Recognise and promote diversity, equity and inclusiveness.
3. Manage team workloads and develop managers who are effective communicators.
4. Provide education for all team members:
 - on the effects on individuals who are the subject of bullying and the supports and remedies available,
 - the responsibilities of witnesses to report and managers to intervene and investigate bullying and
 - the consequences (disciplinary action) for perpetrators of bullying behaviour and retraining on acceptable communication for bullies
5. Implement team processes for conflict resolution and reporting bullying including confidential support to complainants.

NZNO recognises that bullying is not:

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

(see the NZNO website for more details: <https://www.nzno.org.nz/bullyfree>)

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References

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Other Resources

Royal College of Nurses

[https://www.rcn.org.uk/get-help/rcn-advice/bullying-and-harassment#Bullying and harassment](https://www.rcn.org.uk/get-help/rcn-advice/bullying-and-harassment#Bullying%20and%20harassment)

Australian College of Nurses

https://acn.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ps_bulling_in_the_workplace_c2-1.pdf