

Professionalism in the Clinical Setting: How Do We Uphold the Values of Our Profession?



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Problem

Students report that their clinical rotations do not foster growth as a result of incivility imposed by professional nurses. Incivility, negative attitudes and behaviors all impede learning and threaten student progression. Students are reporting their clinical rotations do not foster growth as a result of unprofessional behaviors displayed by professional nursing staff. Are we promoting professionalism in the clinical setting?

Background

Has nursing become so desensitized to acts of incivility that students have become victims in the learning environment? Do students feel safe and comfortable seeking advice, asking questions, or talking through a tough situation? Clark, Olender, Cardoni, and Kenski (2011) note that incivility, and disruptive, negative behaviors are commonplace in nursing education.

As educators and leaders, it is our responsibility to foster a culture of professionalism through positive role modeling. We must be aware of the importance of role modeling to facilitate a safe clinical environment where students can flourish and grow. Healthy relationships between RNs, staff, and clinical faculty is imperative to promote a positive experience.

Student Assignment

Students in a BSN leadership course describe the impact of their personal incident involving incivility in the clinical setting in a three to five page essay. The purpose for the assignment was to have the student reflect on their incident, identify a leadership style, change theory, and communication style that could be used by them in future situations.

Student Account

N= 79; (49 Accelerated Entry; 30 Traditional Co-op)

- “The professor responded in a vindictively aggressive fashion, in front of two staff nurses [seriously? Have you been paying attention at all?! You won’t pass this program unless you get it together]”. (Humiliation)
- “Looking for some guidance on how to handle the situation, I sought out my clinical instructor and informed her that the nurse did not seem open to working with me and asked if she had any suggestions for me.....What she told me was that this kind of behavior is pretty typical in nursing and therefore I should just learn to deal with it”. (Discounted; Frustration)
- “I was assigned to a nurse that said I needed to look at information on my own because she ‘didn’t have time to give a student report’. When I asked her questions regarding the patient's treatment plan, she would roll her eyes before answering my question in a curt manner”. (Discounted)
- “A student asked a nurse several questions during the shift. About halfway through clinical the nurse suddenly, and with the use of profanity, shouted, [If this student asks me one more question, I am going to put her head through the wall. The nurse slammed the chart down and walked down].” (Humiliation; Fear)
- “I broke down in tears and in that moment, I thought I didn’t have what it would take to become a nurse.” (Hopeless)



Themes

- Frustration
- Fear
- Hopeless
- Humiliation
- Discounted



Leadership Strategies

- Incivility Zero Tolerance Policy, inclusive of students.
- Maintain lines of communication between staff and clinical faculty.
- Promote a culture of acceptance for students.
- Offer a Mentorship program for staff who desire to be student mentors.
- Focus on excellence ; immediately address the situation.
 - (Adapted from Bartholomew, 2014)

Recommendations

- Demonstrate professionalism.
- Show respect for students and colleagues.
- Create a safe mentoring environment where students feel free to be honest.
- See clinical through the eyes of the student.
- Encourage and teach student the art of holding a crucial conversation.

References

- Bartholomew, K., (2014). Ending Nurse-to-Nurse hostility: Why nurses eat their young and each other. Danvers, MA: HCPro.
- Clark, C.M., Olender, L., Cardoni, C., and Kenski, D., (2001). Fostering civility in nursing education and practice.: Nursing leadership perspectives. *Journal of Nursing Administration* 41 (7/8), 324-330.