# Fostering a Kind and Civil Culture in Long-Term Care

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Provision 1.5 of the American Nursing Association's (ANA; 2015a) Code of Ethics for Nurses, Relationships with Colleagues and Others, describes a nurse's responsibility to interact respectfully with all individuals, including their colleagues. This NICHE Evidence-Based Corner highlights the ethical imperative of creating healthy work environments based on high quality relationships and offers insights into how nurse leaders can foster a kind and civil culture among all staff, including those in front-line leadership positions. Nurse leaders in long-term and post-acute care settings face unique challenges in implementing and maintaining such a culture yet doing so is a must to ensure healthy work environments in which staff provide safe, quality care (Nickitas, 2014; Oppel, Mohr, & Benzer, 2019).

In the Code for Ethics for Nurses, the ANA (2015a) calls on nurses to "maintain professional, respectful, and caring relationships with colleagues" and create "an ethical environment and culture of civility and kindness, treating colleagues...with dignity and respect" (p. 4). Further, in their Position Statement on Incivility, Bullying, and Workplace, the ANA (2015b) calls on nurses and "employers to create and sustain a culture of respect, which is free of incivility, bullying, and workplace violence" (p. 1). Despite these tenets of nursing practice, incivility and bullying are commonplace in healthcare environments, including nursing homes, with all-too-often negative impacts on residents, staff, and organizations (ANA, 2015b; Clark, 2019; Lynette, Echevarria, Sun, & Greene Ryan, 2016).

In their work on incivility in clinical and academic settings, Lynette and colleagues (2016) suggest that Bandura's Social Learning Theory is a useful framework to understand and address incivility in the workplace. This constructivist theory explains one's behavior is driven by what they have observed and learned. As such, when nursing staff observe negative behaviors, particularly those left unchecked by leadership, they imitate them. The opposite is also true; when kindness and civility are the norm, they are imitated (Clark, 2019; Lynette et al., 2016; Kurt, 2019). Bandura's theory emphasizes that observation can lead to imitation without learning, however. It also stresses the need for attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation for learning to occur (Kurt, 2019). The final two of these are especially pertinent in promoting a kind and civil culture in long-term care. It is important for nurse leaders to repeatedly practice (or reproduce) positive behaviors and require that their front-line leaders to do the same. Additionally, it is critical that leaders motivate staff to act with civility and kindness by rewarding such behaviors. All too often, nurse leaders focus their energy and attention at addressing problematic behaviors while not taking the time to reward those exhibiting collegial, positive behavior.

Based on their literature review on incivility, Lynette and colleagues (2016) suggest a three-prong approach to create a civil and kind clinical environment. First, acknowledge that incivility and unkindness exist. Openly identify unacceptable behaviors, including verbal and nonverbal behaviors, and address them. Next educate staff, including on how incivility negatively impacts the residents, fellow staff members, and the organization. Consider using case studies as a neutral method to teach acceptable behavior as well as how to confront colleagues who are displaying unacceptable behaviors. Finally, "create an environment of integrity" (Lynette et al., 2016, p. 266). Doing so includes setting and communicating expectations for behavior during orientation to the organization and on an ongoing basis. Nurse leaders should ensure that their behavior is congruent with the Code of Ethics for Nurses, and they should not accept less from their colleagues on the nurse leadership team or the staff.

Despite the ethical tenets of nursing supporting civility and kindness among colleagues, incivility continues to pervade healthcare across the continuum. Nurse leaders in long-term and post-acute care are uniquely positioned to address this issue through modeling, teaching, and only accepting kind and civil behavior in the workplace. By ensuring a kind and civil workplace, nurse leaders support positive resident outcomes, staff satisfaction, and overall organizational health (Nickitas, 2014; Oppel et al., 2019). The steps to address incivility are not complex; however, successfully implementing takes true leadership and perseverance. Nurse leaders in long-term and post-acute care are surely up for the task. ◆

Nurses Improving Care for Healthsystem Elders (NICHE) is a nursing education and consultation program designed to improve geriatric care in healthcare organizations. Find out more about NICHE at *nicheprogram.org*

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