

Chapter 8: Managing Human Relations and Staff Support Strategies

Canadian Leadership Case Study

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Canadian nursing academic environments have traditionally held a high standard of ethics and moral behavior, yet bullying still occurs among academic professionals. Nursing education can better prepare students for real world practice by incorporating lessons about workplace violence in undergraduate core curriculum. Educators must continually be role modeling appropriate and healthy communication that has zero tolerance for bullying.

The following case scenario describes a situation and contains critical reflective questions to enhance the knowledge about managing workplace violence, such as bullying.

Shelly is a master's prepared Academic Nursing Advisor in an undergraduate nursing education programme. Academic nursing advisors are a part of a hierarchical leadership framework. The academic advisors work with a leadership team including several members who are higher up the hierarchy framework such as the Program Head, and Program Chair, Associate Dean, and Deans. The leadership team is responsible to provide leadership and counsel to faculty, staff and students, as well as other ongoing responsibilities within the university and nursing programme.

Shelly is the newest member of the leadership team and she works closely with the other Academic Nursing Advisor counselling students, planning student orientations, and creating student schedules. In a short period of time, Shelly becomes autonomous, forms collaborative relationship with others, and conscientiously fulfils her role within the leadership team. After a few months, Shelly starts to notice some aggressive behaviors from her co-advisor. Her co-advisor starts excluding her from attending important programme meetings. Even though, the Dean notices Shelly is not attending meetings as expected, Shelly does not feel the need to address the behaviors with her co-advisor.

Over time, Shelly witnesses her co-advisor displaying more aggressive behaviors toward her such as, rolling her eyes, making hurtful comments about her to other faculty, excluding her, and posting critical comments about her on Facebook. The co-advisor's behavior continues to be inappropriate and unprofessional.

To resolve this conflict, Shelly follows conflict resolution theory and privately addresses her concerns with her co-advisor in a professional, non-threatening manner. Her co-advisor denies Shelly's concerns and dismisses them as Shelly being inexperienced and paranoid. The outcome of Shelly's approach leads to the intimidating behaviors escalating to name calling, withholding critical information, silence, yelling, slamming doors, and refusing to work with Shelly. The behavior is seen by Shelly and others as abusive.

Shelly's job satisfaction begins to decrease. She feels like a failure and she begin to question her decisions and professional judgement. Shelly frequently leaves work feeling stressed, exhausted, humiliated and defeated. She finds it more difficult to fulfil her role on the

leadership team, and she finds that she isolates herself from her colleagues. Shelly decides to continue to follow conflict resolution theory and discusses the issue with her Program Chair for guidance.

In this scenario, Shelly is experiencing violence in the workplace in the form of bullying from an academic colleague. Knowing how to effectively manage these bullying situations is an important aspect of professional nursing practice. Handling workplace violence in an efficient and effective manner fosters a healthy and safe work environment.

Critical Reflective Questions

1. As a professional have you ever been the recipient of abusive behavior?
2. Identify a conflict resolution strategy for this scenario? (Embree and White, 2010)
3. How can nurse leaders create and foster healthy workplaces in an effort to reduce bullying? (Bennett and Swatzky, 2013; Longo et al., 2011)
4. Identify some of the anticipated personal, organizational and professional effects of bullying? (Embree and White, 2010)
5. What level/type of violence in the workplace is Shelly experiencing? (e.g. horizontal or lateral violence)

References

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