

Chapter 15

Handling Conflict in the Nursing Profession

How Conflict Occurs

■ Conflict

- Defined as real or perceived differences between individuals with differing values, ideas, or goals
 - Conflict is inevitable
 - The results can be constructive if there is resolution of the conflict before it escalates to unmanageable proportions
- When poorly managed, can create distance and distrust, and lower productivity
- When well managed, can stimulate cooperation, identify legitimate differences, and problems in an organization, and serve as strong motivator for change

How Conflict Occurs (cont'd)

- Competitive or opposing actions of incompatibles
 - Some people or groups simply are incompatible
 - Competition can also put people or groups in conflict with one another
 - People choose to be incompatible with one another

How Conflict Occurs (cont'd)

- Mental struggle resulting from opposing or incompatible
 - Needs
 - Drives
 - Wishes
 - Internal or external demands
- Often results from distribution of scarce resources
- Managers should identify scarce resources, work to increase availability, and make a plan to manage the anticipated conflict

How Conflict Occurs (cont'd)

■ Collusion

- Formation of subgroup on a hospital unit is indicative of an informal coalition of staff that has formed for the purpose of conspiring, either openly or in secret for the purpose of developing informal power
- Acceptable to seek outside support and counseling from management

Types of Conflict in Nursing

- Nurse-to-nurse conflict
 - Arise from different philosophies, professional experiences, collusion, or incivility
 - Imbalance of power and interferes with sense of safety
 - Lateral violence
- Nurse-to-physician conflict
 - Due to view of a power differential
 - These conflicts disrupt culture of safety and prevent safe patient care
 - Lack of communication and teamwork

Types of Conflict in Nursing (cont'd)

■ Nurse-to-patient conflict

- Arises when patients and families do not feel heard or are not provided with shared decision-making opportunities
- Behaviors that trigger conflict
 - Not returning pages promptly, ignoring patient pain, medications not given on time, and abrasive communication
- Need to make patients feel that they are partners in decision making

■ Staffing

- Budgetary restrictions, nursing shortages, transparency

Causes of Conflict and Approaches to Resolving It

- Causes of conflict
 - Role ambiguity
 - Communication is crucial
 - Limited resources
 - Good example is competition over December holiday schedule days off
 - Distancing and unifying mechanisms
 - Distancing: a person purposely keeping others at a distance
 - Unifying: behaviors that bring people “too” close together in a professional environment

Causes of Conflict and Approaches to Resolving It (cont'd)

- Perceived conflict or felt conflict
 - A feeling or aura of unaddressed conflict or threat
- Unresolved conflict from a prior conflict
 - Caused by failed communication in previous conflict

Establishing a Conflict Resolution Style

- Communication styles
 - Effective communication is core skill
 - Inward reflection and openness to feedback
 - Positive nonverbal communication
 - Speech tone
 - Facial expressions
 - Gestures
 - Active listening
 - Giving one full attention
 - Eye contact

Establishing a Conflict Resolution Style (cont'd)

- Role of LPN in managing conflict
 - Novice nurses/managers are not prepared to manage conflict
 - Report problems to manager and obtain advice to integrate with your own knowledge to assist in resolving conflicts
 - Resolve conflicts only if you have the title or responsibility

Transactional Approach to Conflict Management

- Transactional analysis
 - Four approaches to conflict management:
 - **Win-lose:** the boss is always right
 - Keeps employees from doing best work
 - **Win-yield:** the boss is always right
 - Employees do not even try to resolve conflict because they assume they will lose
 - **Lose-lose:** problems do not get solved
 - Conflict is here to stay and no one manages it
 - **Win-win:** each conflict is resolved using caring approach
 - All parties feel good about the situation and resolution

Other Important Skills

■ Art of Negotiation

- Use when conflict occurs on a regular basis related to the same concern or problem
- Necessary to finding a win-win resolution
- Three rules of negotiation
 - Don't take what is said personally! Don't do what comes naturally! Don't get defensive
 - Identify the need being expressed
 - Each person needs to give up something

Other Important Skills (cont'd)

■ Managing anger

- Responding to anger with anger only escalates the problem
- “White out” or listen in a polite and respectful manner, control natural reactions
- Postpone conflict resolution until everyone can participate safely