

The Unseen Risk: Lateral Violence in Perianesthesia Care

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Abstract Background Information: In perianesthesia nursing, where pressure is intense and patient transitions occur rapidly, nurses must collaborate efficiently despite often lacking long-standing trust. Increasingly, staff report emotional strain not from patient care itself but from peer interactions. Lateral violence (LV), which includes behaviors such as exclusion, condescension, and covert hostility affects up to 83% of nurses (Zhang et al., 2022). This toxic environment erodes morale, contributes to nurses' attrition, and threatens patient safety. Perianesthesia units are especially vulnerable due to brief, high-stakes interactions and generational cultural differences that contribute to misalignment.

Objectives of Project: This project aimed to raise awareness of lateral violence and its impact on team dynamics, promote psychological safety through everyday communication, introduce actionable low-resource strategies to foster respect and inclusion, normalize peer recognition and early correction of unprofessional behaviors, and support nurse retention by enhancing belonging and trust.

Process of Implementation: Five culture-shifting strategies were seamlessly integrated into daily workflows without requiring formal data collection.

Weekly recognition/shoutouts at team huddles to amplify peer recognition and strengthen camaraderie.

- The introduction of a neutral "Code Word for Kindness" ("Let's refocus") empowered staff to address incivility in real time, promoting accountability while maintaining psychological safety.
- Zero-tolerance messaging through visual signage and confidential reporting reinforced professional standards.
- Peer-nominated caregiver awards highlighted positive contributions
- Daily attention to micro behaviors, such as intentional eye contact, respectful tone, gratitude, clarification over criticism, and constructive feedback improved interpersonal interactions.
- With a focus on psychological safety, these interventions emphasized active listening, patience, and blame-free inquiry, especially during high-stress handoffs.

Statement of Successful Practice: While formal metrics were not gathered, staff feedback consistently noted increased awareness, enhanced respect, and a renewed commitment to kindness and professionalism. This initiative provides a scalable model for improving team cohesion and resilience in high acuity perianesthesia settings.

Implications for Advancing the Practice of Perianesthesia Nursing: Addressing lateral violence is essential to nurse retention, safety, and morale. Embedding respectful communication and psychological safety into perianesthesia workflows strengthens team performance and elevates patient care quality.