

Harassment in the Workplace

By Marlene Hill, RN, CPN(C)

The very important basic principle of "Refuse to accept or condone any form of harassment" was intentionally omitted from a previous President's message titled "Basic Principles" (June, 2000 CORNJ) as I thought it deserved to be given special and separate consideration. For proper timing, it was necessary to present the messages on "Certification" and "Standards" first.

It seems that highly motivated and assertive individuals are attracted to the OR - a place which can, at times, be remarkably stressful and hectic.

I am of the "old school" where you quickly learned to develop a "thick skin" if you wished to remain in the operating room and enjoy a long career in perioperative nursing. The following address reflects my thoughts only, so differing opinions may occur.

Physical and sexual harassment must not be accepted or condoned. Evidence of this should be reported to the appropriate personnel as soon as possible.

Some people are considerate and employ good basic principles displaying an even temper in calm as well as in emergency/tense situations. These individuals are well liked and receive great respect from other members of the operating room team.

I have kept **verbal abuse** separate from other forms of harassment because, although it should not be tolerated, there are times when causes for it may be explained to some extent. Examples of where it may be advisable to let common sense prevail by disregarding the unpleasantness until a later time when the matter of concern can be discussed privately include:

- When haemorrhage or other crisis occurs and the tense surgeon lashes out at the nearest team member, the scrub nurse;
- When a patient's condition rapidly deteriorates and the anaesthetist requires much help in a short period of time; and
- When a surgeon finds himself/herself with inexperienced personnel during a complex procedure and becomes frustrated.

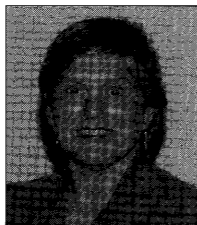
Verbal harassment emotionally injures the individual to whom it is directed. However, the damage done may be lessened if the offender makes amends

with words like "I'm sorry" and "thank you", when the situation becomes less tense. Following the procedure, if steps are not taken by the offending physician/individual to make amends and resolve the issue, the victim should approach the offender privately. If no satisfaction is gained, or if the abused person is not comfortable in confronting the abuser by herself/himself, it is appropriate for the registered nurse in charge of the OR theatre to help defend the victim by confirming with the offender and perioperative nurse manager that a wrongful act was committed and that a resolution is expected.

To my way of thinking, an already tense situation could be aggravated if the verbally-wronged person addresses the harassment at the time by speaking strongly to the offender or by threatening to vacate the room. We must remember that the delivery of quality patient care cannot be compromised.

This message will probably stimulate dialogue among members with differing points of view. Some with more aggressive tendencies or from other schools of thought may disagree with my idea that common sense should prevail in certain verbal harassment cases. However, if we put things in proper perspective, the delivery of the best patient care possible should take priority.

This is the last of my series of President's Messages. I hope you have found them interesting and providing some "food for thought". My term of office as ORNAC President is over at the close of the Banff National Conference. My successor is Mary Knight Kubasiewicz from Winnipeg, Manitoba. She is very knowledgeable and I have full faith that Canadian perioperative registered nurses will indeed benefit from her leadership and guidance.



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My thanks is extended to the many individuals who have supported me during the past two years, to the ORNAC Board and Executive, the provincial conference organizers and delegates who have made me feel so welcome, and the management and OR staff of my institution, the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, for granting me paid leave to attend the required conferences and meetings, and for providing other thoughtful considerations.

My term of office has allowed me to travel extensively and meet a great deal of fine people. Their kindness and friendship was appreciated and will always be remembered.

As a parting gift, I'll share with you some thought-provoking and very true quotes taken from a wonderful mail-order magazine, "Successories":

"1) True leaders are not those who strive to be first, but those who are first to serve and give their all for the success of the team.

2) Teamwork is the ability to work together to-

wards a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishment toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.

3) The Power of Attitude - Our lives are not determined by what happens to us, but how we react to what happens, not by what life brings to us, but by the attitude we bring to life. A positive attitude causes a chain reaction of positive thoughts, events and outcomes. It is a catalyst... a spark that creates extraordinary results.

4) Achievement - Unless you try to do something beyond what you have already mastered you will never grow. And last, my favourite:

5) The Essence of a New Day - This is a beginning of a new day. You have been given this day to use as you will. You can waste it or use it for good. What you do today is important because you are exchanging a day of your life for it. When tomorrow comes, this day will be gone forever; in its place is something that you have left behind... let it be something good". □

World Conference of Surgical Patient Care

September 2 - 7, 2001, Christchurch, New Zealand

AORN and the International Planning Committee, (IPC) have been working diligently to plan and offer a first-class World conference in beautiful New Zealand. A mailout of registration booklets was completed in December, 2000. For those who did not receive it, the information including registration, accessible hotels, program content, social events, hospital tours, and available vacation tour packages, can be obtained through the Internet by contacting www.aorn.org and 'clicking on' World Conference.

Information may also be obtained by contacting: AORN, Inc. Customer Service/World, 2170 S Parker Rd., Suite 300, Denver, CO 8023 -5711, USA.

The conference theme "Vision for the New Millennium: A new Beginning" is quite timely and was chosen with the idea of providing interesting educational sessions for delegates either directly or indirectly involved with perioperative nursing care.

Canadians who have been chosen to speak are Catherine Bustard, and co-presenters Valerie Zellemeier and Pat Pocok. Their topics are "Oh My Aching Back: Spinal Implants" and "Best Practices and Clinical Outcomes" respectively. Congratulations on being selected!

During Opening Ceremonies at the last World Conference in Helsinki, it was heart-warming for the

representatives carrying her/his nation's flag across the stage to see individuals seated together and waving small flags of their country. It would be lovely to see the Canadian contingent seated together and waving their flags proudly on the first day so do not forget to pack this item.

It has been past practice for Canadian delegates to dress in coordinating colors of red and white on International Fellowship Night. ORNAC usually provides several accessories that Canadian delegates may purchase for a small fee. The "Canadian attire" will remain the same as in Helsinki, Finland with the red hats and white and red scarves. These will be available for sale in Banff at the ORNAC booth at a cost of \$15.00 for both, or, if desired, purchase may be made through the mail by sending a cheque payable to ORNAC for the amount of \$18.00 (includes shipping charges) to me at: R. R. #1, Crapaud, PE, C0A 1J0.

On International Fellowship Night, Canadian delegates are invited to meet just inside the front entrance at 1955 hours for a group photo that will be published in the CORNJ along with conference "highlights". Also on this evening, it is customary to exchange small mementos, so come prepared with Logo Pins and Canadian souvenirs as 'give-aways'.

Submitted by Marlene Hill, IPC Planning Member.