

Inter- and intraprofessional respect: A dying concept?

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Much has been written in the literature involving disruptive behavior among clinicians^[3,5,6] and its effects on patient safety. There are also many papers that appear in the literature discussing workplace incivility and stress among healthcare professionals.^[2,7]

Unfortunately, the amount and timeliness of this literature suggests a sad fact. The problem of incivility and lack of respect in the workplace is getting worse, not better. Nurses are notorious for not respecting each other. The worn out cliché of “nurses eat their young” is, sadly, still relevant. Regrettably, it is not just new nurses who are treated poorly. More aggressive, more powerful nurses treat underlings, the timid, and less well-connected nurses with the same disdain as more seasoned nurses treat the less experienced.

Physicians are no innocents. The hierarchy of attending, fellow, resident, intern, is fraught with the more powerful and experienced taking advantage of those who are less so. There is also animosity between primary care and specialty providers. And we cannot forget the acrimony between specialties who display the attitude of “Those (fill-in-the-blank) docs are clueless.”

Inter-professional lack of respect, perhaps, is the worst. Physicians, largely, do not respect nurses. Nurses do not respect nursing assistants and nurses’ behavior toward nursing students is abysmal. Even nursing instructors and faculty have come under the microscope as bullying of students appear to be on the rise.^[1,4]

Why is the notion of basic respect then; not only among professionals, but also among the human race, in general, so poorly adhered to? Is disrespect prevalent due to time constraints, competing priorities, or an overarching trend of narcissism in society? While the aforementioned are indicators, they are not excuses for disrespect among healthcare workers. We, as individuals, do not have much

influence with respect to work flow (especially others’ work flow), nor can we immediately change the rules and regulations within a healthcare organization that causes stress to emerge. We can, however, change our behavior as members, not only as members of a profession or institution, but also as members of society. We can treat colleagues and others with respect. We can improve our listening and communication skills. We can consider new ideas, embrace new strategies and make a concentrated effort to respect individuals for the contributions they make not only in the workplace (although the workplace would be an ideal place to start) but to humankind as a whole.

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