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THE INSTITUTE
FOR PATIENT CARE

ISFORMATION

The Norman Knight Nursing Center
for Clinical & Professional Development

UCs Quick Reference: Conflict in the Workplace

What is conflict?

The dictionary defines conflict as a strong disagreement between people, groups, etc., that often results in an angry argument or a disagreement between ideas, feelings, etc. Unfortunately, conflict exists everywhere and the hospital setting is no different. The hospital environment is very demanding, always changing and challenging, and there are large numbers of staff to interact with. There is both healthy conflict and damaging conflict. Healthy conflict can result in new ideas or ways to solve problems and it can increase awareness that there is a problem in the workplace. Damaging conflict however can result in name calling, personal attacks, gossip and rumors, a fear to speak up, and a lack of mutual respect.

What do you need to know?

There are 6 steps to resolving conflict:

(Before you begin the discussion, make sure to find a mutually agreed upon time and place that is private)

1. Clarify what the disagreement is about – what is the problem
2. Establish a common goal for both parties – what can you both agree upon as a goal to manage the problem
3. Talk about ways to meet that common goal.
4. Determine and discuss the roadblocks preventing you from reaching your common goal
5. Agree on the best way to resolve the conflict
6. Acknowledge the agreed solution to the conflict and discuss the responsibility each party has in resolving the conflict

Realize that this process can be a difficult one and may require a third party to help you resolve. Typically, this would be your unit leadership.

Research shows that *not* resolving conflict often causes unsafe working conditions, poor patient care, decreased patient safety, increased hospital costs, decrease job satisfaction, and is even linked to serious errors results in patient deaths.

What can you do to minimize conflict among colleagues

- Offer thanks to coworkers when it is deserved *"Thank you very much for helping me with the patient concern."*
- Give credit to coworkers when it has been earned – *"You did a great job caring for that difficult patient."*
- Avoid engaging in negativity or gossip on your unit and try to end the gossip *"Isn't our job hard enough without talking about each other behind backs?"*
- Avoid holding grudges and accept apologies *"Thank you for apologizing, I really appreciate it."*
- Offer apologies when you are wrong *"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said/done that..."*
- Think about your behaviors which could be affecting relationships
- Ask for and accept feedback graciously, this is how we all learn and grow