

## WORKPLACE ISSUES: Z-CH 25

### Case Studies

1. As a nursing student, Angie learned the proper handling of patients in her fundamentals course. During clinical rotation, Angie is assigned a patient with left-sided weakness related to a stroke and dementia. She reviews her notes on positioning, transferring, and handling a patient with musculoskeletal weakness. When entering the patient's room, Angie finds the patient halfway out of bed. She rushes to assist the patient to sit and immediately afterwards feels a sharp pain in her back. Subsequently, Angie has a herniated lumbar disk and is unable to continue nursing school.

- a) How should Angie have approached moving this patient?

Perhaps Angie should have also made note of, or reviewed notes related to proper body mechanics. Though she took obvious steps to protect the safety of her patient, unfortunately the same attention was not given to protection related to injury prevention for herself. In this scenario, she should have responded immediately and adjusted her posture by tightening her core muscles and using leg strength to propel movements as she helped the patient into a seated position. Calling for help or pressing the patient's call light for additional assistance is also a step Angie could have taken. If this was the step taken in this case, she could have rushed to the patient's side, and verbally tried to reorient and guide them down to a seated position, rather than relying solely on physical intervention.

- b) What did Angie do correctly in this situation?

In terms of what Angie did correctly, she noted the Left-sided affect her patient was experiencing. She was also correct in her efforts to review notes related to positioning, transferring, and handling a patient with musculoskeletal weakness. When Angie recognized that this patient was half-way out of bed, and the potential for the injury to the patient, she responded immediately, which was also correct.

- c) Explain why back problems are the number-one cause of nurse injuries and describe the subsequent effects on nursing care.

Bedside nursing can be very physically involved, as it often requires nurses to bend, reach, and lift things as part of their daily duties. Bending, reaching, and lifting movements increases chance of injury as they all involve use of back and core muscles, therefore, nurses are especially prone to stress and injuries on their back. In the case of prolonged or recurring stress on muscles and spine, the effects can add up to major effects such as chronic pain, limited range of motion, and decreased strength. All of these effects can interfere with the nurses ability to

perform functions of his/her job and is likely to affect their overall quality of life. With that said, it is crucial that proper body mechanics are utilized each and every time.

d) Describe how the “safe patient handling” legislation might have prevented the injury.

Safe patient handling legislation could have helped prevent the injury because it creates standards for handling situations like this. By having these standards in place, those involved in direct patient care may receive better and more consistent training in proper maneuvering, and in turn will be better equipped and also more aware of the importance of self-protection against injury.

2. Becky graduated from nursing school a year ago and since then, has worked on a neurology unit. Normally a happy and healthy person, Becky recently noticed that she always feels run down and is losing her hair. During the past year, she was told that her assessment skills were lacking because she missed an important finding on a patient while covering for another nurse. Her supervisor seemingly assigns her high-risk admits every time she works. Her co-workers complain that Becky always gets the lightest patient assignments and should take the admissions. Last week, she overheard another nurse saying, “Becky is almost useless. She spends so much time with her patients she can never help other nurses.” Becky feels physically ill every time she goes to work. She wonders if these “tests” of her nursing skills will ever end.

a) What type of violence is Becky experiencing?

Becky is experiencing lateral (emotional) violence.

b) Which of the signs of bullying from Table 25-1 is (are) evidenced in this scenario?

It seems as though Becky is being left out of office culture, is being asked to do tasks outside of her duties yet is judged critically by her performance. She is being asked to do difficult tasks and yet is being ridiculed when she isn't successful.

c) What steps can Becky take to minimize bullying in the workplace? Becky should report these findings to her supervisor, including the comments being made as well as the high-risk load, she has been consistently getting. She can also approach colleagues directly to clue them in to why she has been so focused on her own patients.

d) What can Becky do if her supervisor brushes off her concerns? She can take the concerns to a higher ranking individual, and perhaps reach out to nurse educators or a strong nurse leader in the unit to ask for advice.

3. Amanda is caring for an 82-year-old patient with a fractured hip and dementia. In the shift report, she learns that the patient becomes agitated and combative at night. During her evening shift assessment, Amanda notes that the patient does not know where she is or why Amanda is in her room. Amanda remembers her hospital training on dealing with agitated patients by using soothing tones when addressing the patient and ensuring a calm environment. During assessment, the patient yells that Amanda is killing her. She begins swinging at Amanda with the telephone, breaking her jaw. Amanda runs out of the room, and her co-worker calls a “Code White.”

- a. What is a Code White, and how would it help in this situation?

It notifies staff of a potentially violent situation.

- b. Identify elements of this case that signal a potentially threatening situation.

Amanda notices that the patient is not oriented and is expressing confusion as to who she is and why she is there, indicating that the patient may be feeling threatened already, as well as the other signs of distress, such as the patient yelling out about feeling endangered.

- c. What preventive measures does the facility have in place to deal with hostile situations?

It sounds as though Amanda received education at some point about ways to handle patients with confusion/dementia. The hospital also seems to have a safety response system in place which was indicated when Amanda called for a Code White.

- d. If Amanda were floated to another floor where this situation occurred, would this change how she should approach the situation? Explain your answer.

I don't believe it should. Standards related to emergency response are very important to utilize, as it is recognizable and likely to get the quickest responses in case of potentially violent situations as well as any other emergency or threat. These standards are in place for a reason, and the systems only work if we use them.

4. In reviewing available hospital employment, you identify three potential positions as a staff nurse in orthopedics. Because orthopedics is where you would like to work, you evaluate each of the positions:

- Position 1: A regional medical center, with a nurse to patient ratio of 5:1. Total patient care is expected of all nurses, and there is only one nursing assistant assigned to each unit. The hospital recently purchased safe handling equipment for every unit.
- Position 2: An urban hospital with a nurse to patient ratio of 9:1. There is one nursing assistant assigned to every nurse. The hospital has new patient handling equipment, although it is shared between two units.
- Position 3: a local hospital with a nurse to patient ratio 7:1. There is one nursing assistant for every nine patients. The hospital is moving toward Magnet status and uses a shared governance model.

- a) Explore each position in relation to your safety as a nurse. What are the benefits and detriments of each position? The first offers the lowest nurse to patient ratio, however, the lack of nursing assistants is significant in that indicates a larger workload with each patient. Having safe handling equipment available in each unit is a strength of this opportunity. The second does offer nursing assistants, which surely will help with the workload, but a 9:1 ratio is quite large and creates quite a demand on the nurse even with the extra help. The fact that safe handling equipment is being shared between units is concerning because it is not readily available and increases the chance for unsafe situations occurring. The last option offers the same amount of help from the support staff, but has a 7:1 ratio which is better. A stand out feature of this option is the goal of Magnet status, because it

assures that certain standards are being strived for by this organization, including factors that pertain to patient safety.

- b) Which position provides the safest working environment? Explain your response? I feel that the third option provides the safest environment. Even with a slightly higher patient ratio, the help of nursing assistants will make a huge difference in both the nurses workload and the overall safety of the environment. Additionally, the efforts toward a shared governance model and the magnet status shows us that hospital leadership is striving for high standards of care which should also indicate a better work environment.
- c) What additional questions should be asked in relation to staffing? I would likely ask about expectations related to overtime, how call-offs are responded to (staffing wise), and the staff turn-over rate.
- d) The hospital in position 3 is described as working towards Magnet status. What impact might this have on your decision to accept or turn down an employment offer?
- The magnet status entails efforts to have satisfied nurses and high standards of care. The focuses include efforts toward quality, education/knowledge, professional practices, empowerment, and strong leadership. These qualities can inherently bring better working environments and better care for patients. A facility who is focused on obtaining this status is more attractive because a nurse can expect to be better supported there.