



Stopping sexual harassment and violence against nurses

The importance of reporting

Hardly a day goes by without another #MeToo story in the news, exposing an increasingly darker side of the worlds of academia, business, media, entertainment, sports, and to a lesser degree so far, healthcare.

#EndNurseAbuse, #MeToo, Time's Up, and March for Our Lives are all movements that have gained momentum. But momentum can fade, taking with it our ability to make real and lasting change. That's where our advocacy comes in—from continuing to build awareness about and reporting sexual harassment and violence in the workplace to helping develop and implement effective strategies and policies to stop their occurrence.

The American Nurses Association (ANA) designated 2018 as the "Year of Advocacy" to highlight all the ways ANA and nurses can make a difference, and that includes speaking out on issues affecting our own safety and well-being.

Whenever we take on complex, pervasive problems like violence, questions arise. Shortly after ANA launched our #EndNurseAbuse petition calling for zero tolerance of violence against nurses, we received questions about whether eliminating sexual harassment was part of that initiative. The answer is a resounding "yes."

ANA publicly underscored our strong support for the #TimesUpNow movement that promotes accountability and consequences for abuse, harassment, sexual assault, and inequality in the workplace. ANA nursing practice experts and I addressed the issue of sexual harassment in interviews with the media, including *Modern Healthcare* and NBC News. And our #EndNurseAbuse initiative's social media reach has gained unprecedented traction, with more than 300 million media impressions.

Because our profession is predominantly female and healthcare is traditionally hierarchal, the possibility that sexual harassment will be used as an intimidation tactic or as simply acceptable behavior is high. As a result, nurses may dismiss—or endure—being harassed by patients, coworkers, or other healthcare professionals because they view it as part of the job or unsolvable, or they see reporting it as too risky to their careers. But it's persistent and prevalent.

In an ANA member survey from February 2018, 29% of roughly 7,000 respondents said they experienced sexual harassment at work. And in a December 2017 Medscape Medical News poll that included 569 nurses, 73% of female nurses and 46% of male nurses reported being sexually harassed.

Another question I recently fielded involves how to keep nurses safe when they care for patients with neurologic problems, such as traumatic brain injuries or Alzheimer's disease. Viewing these patients as physiologically incapable of controlling their actions, RNs often are reluctant to report abusive behavior or injuries they sustain, or again, they see it as just "part of the job." The fact is, emotional and physical harm can be devastating to nurses, whether it occurs at the hands of a patient who's impaired or a visitor who's angry. It's not a matter of blame. It's an issue of safety. And having effective, preventive strategies, including safe staffing, is key.

To that end, ANA is continuing to expand our efforts to stop all types of violence, including sexual harassment, in the work environment. We've convened a professional issues panel that's addressing barriers to reporting violence and harassment, as well as identifying model workplace violence prevention programs.

On a similar track, we're bringing together stakeholders, including representatives from our member organizations, law enforcement, and healthcare facilities, to strategize solutions to this many-layered issue. We want to ensure nurses report incidents and that reporting leads to satisfactory outcomes and safer environments for nurses and patients.

ANA also is releasing a new issues brief that can serve as another important resource, along with our position statement on violence, incivility, and bullying.

When it comes to ending violence, harassment, and inequality in the workplace, we must work together so all nurses feel empowered to speak up and speak out. Share your stories and strategies (confidentially) at socialmedia@ana.org or via ANA's Capitol Beat blog on #EndNurseAbuse at bit.ly/2Jxxwgv.



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