Healthy Work Environment

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Abstract: *This article will provide information regarding healthy work environment and its importance for nurses, standards need to be established in India and Nurses Bill of Rights. Creating a healthy work environment is a process that requires careful planning and implementation. It also requires the combined efforts of both leaders and employees. A healthy work environment provides for physical, social and psychological or mental health of all personnel in an organization.*

Keywords: Healthy work environment, Nurses, standards, Rights, Wages, Contract system

1. Introduction

A healthy work environment is critical to the wellbeing of every healthcare provider. It is essential for the overall satisfaction of healthcare professionals, for successful recruitment and retention, and for quality of patient or client care. But to achieve a healthy work environment, we are often challenged to think differently about our culture, habits and day - to - day practices at work. Change and implementation takes time and effort, and it takes a comprehensive approach that spans physical, cultural, social and job design conditions.

Meaning
Healthy Work Environments recognize that people are at the heart of the healthcare system and give priority to the multiple aspects of the workplace that have an impact on the mental and physical wellbeing of employees including the cultural, social and job design conditions. Organizations that adopt Healthy Work Environment principles and values, by taking a comprehensive, collaborative approach to ensure workers can function in a safe and respectful atmosphere, are the most successful. Healthy Work Environments promote employee well - being, engagement, retention, productivity and patient safety, all of which affect the bottom line.

Definition
A Healthy working environment is one in which there is not only an absence of harmful conditions that can cause injury and illness, but an abundance of health promoting ones. (WHO, 2010)

A Healthy Workplace is one where employees:
- Feel recognized for the work they do
- Enjoy a positive social environment that encourages respect, fosters a sense of belonging and purpose, and allows employees to fully use their talents
- Enjoy an appropriate balance between work and life responsibilities;
- Feel secure and enjoy a safe physical work environment
- Are assured that psychological health and safety is protected
- Have access to meaningful opportunities to adopt healthy lifestyle practices and coping skills to manage our lives in healthy, productive ways
- Have the ability to influence their work and become involved in the decision - making process
- Are given opportunities for personal, intellectual and professional growth

Importance of Healthy Work Environment
The legacy of Florence Nightingale regarding the importance of total healing environments for patients has had a momentous influence on the development of the fundamental values of healthy work environments.
- In January, 2005 the American Association of Critical Care Nurses released their standards for *Establishing and Sustaining Healthy Work Environments; A Journey to Excellence.* These essential standards include skilled communication, true collaboration, staffing, meaningful recognition, and authentic leadership. These standards have since been adopted by numerous professional nursing organizations and strategically integrated into their work.
- In 2006, Shirey described healthy work environments as "supportive of the whole human being," "patient - focused," and "joyful workplaces."
- As Nightingale's beliefs contributed to the healing of patients, research has demonstrated that a healthy work environment leads to both improved patient outcomes and increased nursing satisfaction. In contrast unhealthy work environments have been linked with medical errors, ineffective delivery of care, conflict, and stress among health professionals.

Nurses working condition in India
Nurses form the backbone of any medical services or patient care in the health sector. But in India, this important section of workers is highly exploited, with lack of respect and dignity at workplaces and more importantly paid extremely low salaries with lack of job security.
- Student Nurses have to Pay Lakhs of Rupees to get Nursing Degree.
- Lack of opportunity to work in Government sector in spite of shortage of staffs in Government sectors.
- Low Payment in Private sectors against the Labour standard
- Bonded contract in many working places for at least 2 - 3 years
- Working more than 8 hours per day
- Most of the Nurse won't get the benefit of Provident Fund (PF), Gratuity and Health coverage.
- Human rights violation in the form of sexual harassment to female nurses

- Lack of work place ethics and respect for the nurse profession

Need for Nurses in India

- Trade Union rights for all the nurses
- End the bond system. Stop confiscation of educational and experience certificates by the hospital management at the time of resignation
- No to workplace harassment by doctors and the hospital management. All nurses should be treated with respect and dignity.
- Standardized Wages at - least according to the minimum wages fixed by the Government. Wages to be revised and adjusted to the cost of living, with mandatory yearly increments.
- 8 hour working day, overtime allowances, yearly leave and other social security benefits.
- Health coverage for all nurses to be borne by the hospital management.
- End the contract system in government hospitals. All nurses should be recruited on a permanent basis and remove all bureaucratic impediments in recruiting nurses in government run hospitals.

The Standards for Establishing and Sustaining Healthy Work Environments:

1) **Skilled Communication**:
   Nurses must be as proficient in communication skills as they are in clinical skills.
2) **True Collaboration**:
   Nurses must be relentless in pursuing and fostering true collaboration.
3) **Effective Decision Making**:
   Nurses must be valued and committed partners in making policy, directing and evaluating clinical care and leading organizational operations.
4) **Appropriate Staffing**:
   Staffing must ensure the effective match between patient needs and nurse competencies.
5) **Meaningful Recognition**:
   Nurses must be recognized and must recognize others for the value each brings to the work of the organization.
6) **Authentic Leadership**:
   Nurse leaders must fully embrace the imperative of a healthy work environment, authentically live it and engage others in its achievement.

Three Elements of a Healthy Workplace

Figure 1: Three Elements of a Healthy Workplace

Nurses' Bill of Rights

To maximize the contributions nurses make to society, it is necessary to protect the dignity and autonomy of nurses in the workplace. To that end, the following rights must be afforded:

- Nurses have the right to practice in a manner that fulfills their obligations to society and to those who receive nursing care.
- Nurses have the right to practice in environments that allow them to act in accordance with professional standards and legally authorized scopes of practice.
- Nurses have the right to a work environment that supports and facilitates ethical practice, in accordance with the Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements.
- Nurses have the right to freely and openly advocate for themselves and their patients, without fear of retribution.
- Nurses have the right to fair compensation for their work, consistent with their knowledge, experience and professional responsibilities.
- Nurses have the right to a work environment that is safe for themselves and for their patients.
- Nurses have the right to negotiate the conditions of their employment, either as individuals or collectively, in all practice settings.
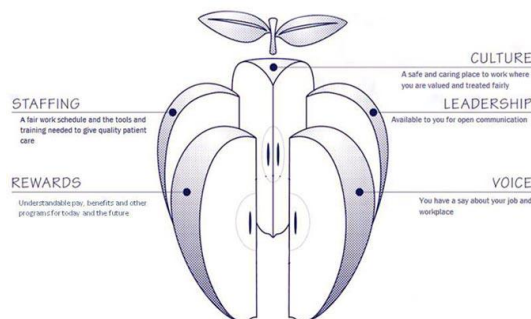

Figure 2: Healthy Work Environment commitment

2. Conclusion

Establishing and sustaining healthy work environments must be a priority if nurses are going to make their optimal contributions in caring for patients and patients' families. The link between healthy work environments and patient safety, nurse retention and recruitment and, thus, the bottom line, is irrefutable.

AACN believes that all workplaces can be healthy if nurses and employers are resolute in their desire to address not only the physical environment, but also less tangible barriers to staff and patient safety. However, we know that this will not happen without an understanding of the factors contributing to unhealthy work environments and a commitment to embrace solutions.

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