Healthy Work Environment

By: Amanda Badgley, Tori Gwilt, Brittany Tersigni, Robyn Veitch, and Sara Williams
What is Healthy Work Environment?

Healthy Work Environment, abbreviated as HWE, is an initiative that was created in 2001 by the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN).

The purpose of the HWE project is to develop and initiate a plan that focuses on restoring the inadequate and often hostile work environment of nurses. The dual purpose of HWE is to increase the quality of care and compassion to patients and their families.

An underlying goal of the HWE effort is to address the drastic and continuing nursing shortage in the United States. The deleterious work conditions in the medical field are considered to be partly responsible for many nursing mistakes and mishaps, as well as insufficient patient care, and contention between co-workers.

The HWE proposes that if nurses were to work in an amicable and harmonious environment, it would drastically decrease the nursing burnout and turnover rate which would help with the nursing shortage all around the United States. HWE also suggests that if there was not so much dissent in the workplace, there would be less medical mistakes and instead, the nurse’s priority would be focused on the care and comfort of the patient (AACN, 2009).
Healthy Work Environment Creed

- In an effort to enact these goals, the AACN generated two concepts that now serve as the foundational doctrine for the HWE crusade:
- First of all, “work and care environments must be safe, healing and humane, respectful of the rights, responsibilities, needs and contributions of patients, their families, nurses and all health professionals” (ACCN, 2009).
- Secondly, “excellence in acute and critical care nursing practice is driven by the needs of patients and their families and is achieved when nurses’ competencies are matched to those needs” (AACN, 2009).
- Although HWE originally began as a mission for critical care nurses, the Healthy Work Environment campaign has since been adapted and practiced in all areas of the nursing profession (AACN, 2009).
To assist in achieving the HWE goals, the AACN established six practice standards to address the defects in the current nursing system.

- Skilled Communication
- True Collaboration
- Effective Decision Making
- Appropriate Staffing
- Meaningful Recognition
- Authentic Leadership
Skilled Communication

“Nurses must be as proficient in communication skills as they are in clinical skills,” (AACN, 2009).
Skilled Communication

- Good communication amongst health care personnel is essential.
- “Skilled communicators focuses on finding solutions and achieving desirable outcomes” (AACN, 2005).
- One must be able to adjust their communication skills to the person to whom they are speaking at a level which with they are comfortable.
- “A culture of safety and excellence requires that individual nurses and healthcare organizations make it a priority to develop among professionals communication skills- including written, spoken and non-verbal- that are on a par with expert clinical skills” (AACN, 2005).
- Skilled communication aides in the prevention of medical errors and sentinel events.
- Healthcare organizations should have well established policies and procedures or programs for effective communication amongst the interdisciplinary team members for the effective sharing of patient health information.
True Collaboration

“Nurses must be relentless in pursuing and fostering true collaboration,” (AACN, 2009).
True Collaboration

- True Collaboration is an ongoing process that all interdisciplinary team members must strive to achieve for the better of the patient.
- “Without the synchronous, ongoing collaborative work of healthcare professionals from multiple disciplines, patient and family needs cannot be optimally satisfied within the complexities of today’s healthcare system” (AACN, 2005).
- Each interdisciplinary team member needs to embrace true collaboration in its entirety for patient satisfaction, patient safety, and staff satisfaction as well.
- “Nearly 90% of the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses’ members and constituents report that collaboration with physicians and administrators is among the most important elements in creating a healthy work environment” (AACN, 2005).
- Treat each other with dignity and respect, get to know coworkers’ professional strengths and weaknesses, build off one another’s strengths to further one’s own professional development, and mentor others to increase their knowledge and expertise (Andres, 2011).
Effective Decision Making

“Nurses must be valued and committed partners in making policy, directing and evaluating clinical care and leading organizational operations” (AACN, 2009).
Effective Decision Making

Critical Points:

- Support for and access to ongoing education and development of programs focusing on strategies that assure collaborative decision making. Program content includes mutual goal setting, negotiation, facilitation, conflict management, systems thinking and performance improvement.

- Clearly articulates organizational values and team members incorporate these values when making decisions.

- Operational structures in place that ensure the perspective of the patient and their families are incorporated into every decision affecting patient care.

- As the single constant professional presence with hospitalized patients, nurses uniquely gather, filter, interpret and transform data from patients and the system into the meaningful information required to diagnose, treat and deliver care to a patient (Kimball & O’Neil, 2002).

- Failure to incorporate the experienced perspective of nurses in clinical and operational decisions may result in costly errors, jeopardize patient safety and threaten the financial viability of healthcare organizations.

- Nurses who do not have control over their practice become dissatisfied and are at risk for leaving an organization.
Appropriate Staffing

“Staffing must ensure the effective match between patient needs and nurse competencies” (AACN, 2009).
Critical Points:

- Staffing policies in place that are solidly grounded in ethical principles and support the professional obligation of nurses to provide high quality care.
- Nurses participate in all organizational phases of the staffing process.
- Formal processes are in place to evaluate the effect of staffing decisions on patient and system outcomes.
- Staffing and outcomes data are used to develop more effective staffing models.
- The likelihood of death or serious complications after surgery increases when fewer nurses are assigned to care for patients (Needleman et al., 2002).

- Because nurses intercept 86% of all medication errors made by other professionals, an increase in these errors will likely occur when nurses are overworked, overstressed and in short supply (Bates, et al., 1995).

- Organizations must engage in dramatic innovation to devise and systematically test new staffing models. All staffing models require methods for ongoing evaluation of staffing decisions in relation to patient and system outcomes (AACN, 2009).
Meaningful Recognition

“Nurses must be recognized and must recognize others for the value each brings to the work of the organization” (AACN, 2009).
Meaningful Recognition

- People who are recognized have higher self-esteem, more confidence and are willing to take on new challenges and contribute new ideas (Shirey, 2008).

- Recognition of the value and meaningfulness of one’s contribution to an organization’s work is a fundamental human need and an essential requisite to personal and professional development (AACN, 2009).

- The healthcare organization has a comprehensive system in place that includes formal processes and structured forums that ensure a sustainable focus on recognizing all team members for their contributions and the value they bring to the work of the organization (AACN, 2009).

- Investment in professional advancement and recognition of achievement are key strategies for organizations to retain both employees and volunteers (Shirey, 2008).

- Employees may achieve better performance through the motivation provided by recognition (Shirey, 2008).
“Nurse leaders must fully embrace the imperative of a healthy work environment, authentically live it, and engage others in its achievement” (AACN, 2009).
Nurse leaders lead the design of systems necessary to effectively implement and sustain standards for healthy work environments (AACN, 2009).

There is anecdotal and qualitative evidence supporting the fact that attending to the well-being of health care workers results in safer and better quality patient care (RNAO, 2008).

The nurse manager leadership style has a direct impact on job satisfaction. A significant relationship was observed between supervisor support and job satisfaction (RNAO, 2008).

To achieve a goal of the safest possible health care system, all leaders and practitioners must have a clear understanding of their collective responsibilities to provide resources and shape the structures and values by which the system operates (RNAO, 2008).

Nurse leaders role model all of the 6 practice standards, skilled communication, true collaboration, effective decision making, appropriate staffing, meaningful recognition, and authentic leadership (AACN, 2009).
Assessment Tools for the HWE Initiative

How do we assess our workplace according to the HWE standards?

What tools are available to do so?

• The American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN) provides a web-based Healthy Work Environment Assessment, located at www.hweteamtool.org. This assessment tool is free of charge and measures a work environment against the AACN Standards for Establishing and Sustaining Healthy Work Environments (AACN, 2009).
Participants are asked to rate their perception of 18 assessment statements that incorporate the 6 essential standards identified by the AACN to “maintain patient safety, ensure optimal outcomes, and support excellence in nursing practice” (AACN, 2009).

Examples of these assessment statements include:

- Administrators, nurse managers, physicians, nurses and other staff maintain frequent communication to prevent each other from being surprised or caught off guard by decisions,
- Administrators, nurse managers and physicians involve nurses and other staff to an appropriate degree when making decisions,
- Most nurses and other staff here have a positive relationship with their nurse leaders,
- Nurses and other staff are able to influence the policies, procedures and bureaucracy around them,
- There are motivating opportunities for personal growth and advancement,
- Administrators, nurse managers, physicians, nurses and other staff members speak up and let people know when they’ve done a good job, and
- Support services are provided at a level that allows nurses and other staff to spend their time on the priorities and requirements of patient and family care (AACN, 2009).
The AACN Assessment Tool provides an overall HWE score as well as scores for each of the 6 individual standards. Assessment results also “recommend steps and resources to help you diagnose the root cause of problems and start the journey to resolve them” (AACN, 2009). The Team Assessment Results, compiled upon the completion of the HWE Assessment Tool, provide:

- A baseline measurement of how participants perceive their work environment,
- Resources to help improve the work environment, and
- A tool to track progress in implementing the AACN Standards for Establishing and Sustaining Healthy Work Environments (AACN, 2009)
The State of Michigan provides a web-based Designing Healthy Environments at Work (DHEW) Assessment Tool, located at www.mihealthtools.org/work/. A downloadable paper version of the assessment is also available.

- The DHEW tool takes approximately 30-60 minutes to complete following an average of 2-4 hours of research and data collection.

- The tool is aimed at “any Michigan worksite that is interested in creating a healthier worksite environment” (Michigan Health Tools, n.d.).

- Issues of concern include:
  - Smoking
  - Physical inactivity
  - Obesity

- A detailed feedback report is provided upon submission of the assessment. The DHEW Tool results recommend ways that the workplace can more effectively support employee health “via policy and/or environmental changes” (Michigan Health Tools, n.d.).
Healthy Work environments:

How it applies to our current nursing practice
In my current practice of Medical Rehabilitation, HWE practice standards influence my nursing practice by molding how I provide quality safe patient care.

HWE practice standards allows me to realize that I need to embrace my personal obligations as a nurse so I can participate in contributing to create a healthy work environment.

These practice standards provides the foundation for my skilled communication, true collaboration, effective decision making, appropriate staffing, meaningful recognition, and authentic leadership in regards to my nursing practice.

I believe that these standards guide my practice in initiating deliberations amongst colleagues to find solutions and paves the way for excellence in my field.
The HWE practice standards are crucial in my continual pursuit of excellence as an operating room (OR) nurse.

Skilled Communication is an element that I must perform on a daily basis. I have to be comfortable to voice any concerns with the entire surgical staff. Otherwise, patient care will suffer as a result.

True Collaboration is a must for the team atmosphere in the OR. It is necessary that I work with surgeons, anesthesia personnel, other nurses, surgical technologists and surgical assistants in order to provide comprehensive perioperative care to the patient.

Effective Decision Making is a necessary skill to function in the fast paced and high intensity OR environment. I must be focused and willing to make efficient decisions.

Appropriate Staffing is an issue that is always a struggle in the OR due to the specialized environment and high turnover rate. However, the managerial staff continues its attempts to make the issue less stressful for staff members.

Meaningful Recognition is the staple in order to keep employees emotionally healthy. In the OR, there is a process called “Cheers for Peers” in which staff is recognized for their exceptional hard work and caring attitude.

Authentic Leadership is a role that each nurse needs to take part in for patient safety. I must be willing to take the lead role and be an advocate for patient comfort and health during each surgical procedure.
Brittany Tersigni

- Skilled Communication: As a bedside nurse it is essential that I have the skills to appropriately and effectively communicate with my patients, as well as the entire healthcare team to assure both patient safety and satisfaction.

- True Collaboration: This goes right along with communication, as I said before it is essential to be able to work together as a team for the best patient care possible.

- Effective Decision Making: At Munson I am a member of Shared Governance, in which we have the ability to change and implement policies as well as give opinion on future organizational operations.

- Appropriate Staffing: On C3 midnights we have an expected 1:6 nurse patient ratio. On the day shift it tends to be 1:4. Either way I enjoy nursing most when there is a 1:3 ratio.

- Meaningful Recognition: Munson believes it is important to recognize its employees, including the Munson Most Valuable Player (MVP), dinner in honor of certain milestones, and a recognition box in our monthly newsletters.

- Authentic Leadership: Munson’s management play a huge role in the success of the hospital. They are dedicated, eager and proud of their role in management.
In my current area, working in an out patient wound center, HWE practice standards influence my nursing practice on a daily basis. A great deal of my job entails teaching patients so that they can become independent and achieve the greatest positive result. It takes skilled communication to be able to interact with the patients when teaching them their treatment plan, proper nutrition, their specific disease process contributing to the wound, safety measures and pain management measures. True collaboration is crucial in achieving this goal because the staff needs to not only communicate the teaching with the patient, but other staff members, as well, so that continuity of care is maintained. As a nurse, I work closely in collaborating with the physicians, as well as other staff nurses, patients, and caregivers to develop the most appropriate treatment plan to fit the individual patient needs. Effective decision making is utilized in revising patient treatment plans, when healing is stalled, patients become noncompliant with care, or wound status declines due to infections such as MRSA or VRE. Appropriate staffing is necessary to allow adequate time to coordinate patient care effectively with outside sources such as DME companies, in ordering wound supplies and equipment, initiating homecare services, in arranging nursing for wound care in patient’s home setting, following up communications with patient’s primary care physician to keep them informed of new treatment plans, and patient’s pharmacy, with calling in new prescriptions for things such as antibiotics or pain medication. Meaningful recognition by coworkers, management, physicians, patients, and caregivers makes all the efforts put forth substantiated. Getting recognized and appreciated for the work you do means a lot and gives you the ambition to be interested in doing it all again the next day. Authentic leadership is displayed on a regular basis in the wound center. My manager works side by side with the staff in taking care of patient needs, developing new policies and procedures, and utilizing the practice standards of the healthy work environment for the ultimate goal of a safe and effective workplace for patients and staff.
In my current practice area of stroke-telemetry nursing, the Healthy Work Environment (HWE) practice standards influence my nursing practice by motivating me to take an active role in ensuring that my floor and organization is a healthy work environment. This is critical as healthy work environments do not just happen; they require “organizational, departmental and unit leaders to ensure that it happens” (AACN, 2009).

Based on my understanding of HWE, I aim to:

1. advocate for adequate staffing to maintain patient safety, especially when acuity is high,
2. provide honest input regarding policy in an effort to shape decision making,
3. communicate frequently and frankly to encourage teamwork and increase awareness, and
4. plan staff get-togethers to promote community.

Why is a HWE important to my practice?

I seek longevity on my current floor as a bedside RN. If my position were to compromise my health or happiness, however, I would look elsewhere. It is accepted that healthy work environments “positively affect nurse retention, level of job stress, work satisfaction, quality of work life, patient safety, satisfaction and length of stay, and outcomes such as absence of adverse events” (Hall, Doran, & Pink, 2008). Given my personal goals, implementing HWE criteria is critical to my success.
References


References Continued...


