Managing Conflict

Problem

Conflict is found in all aspects of society and the workplace. The nursing environment is not immune to it. How nurses maintain relationships and resolve conflict is an important skill for the nursing profession.

Consequence

Failure to effectively deal with conflict can increase occupational stress, be a distraction to patient safety and care, and will likely increase nurse turnover.

Solution

Here are some considerations related to managing conflict.

- Conflict within the nursing profession has traditionally generated negative feelings with many nurses who use avoidance as their primary coping mechanism.
- Avoidance methods of conflict resolution are linked to higher levels of occupational stress; conversely, addressing issues openly is linked to much lower stress.
- Negotiation and conflict resolution are important skills to support teamwork, staff satisfaction, and nurse retention.
- It is the responsibility of nursing leaders to mentor staff in conflict resolution and create a culture of transparency and openness.
- Conflict is normal; it does not denote failure – it means nurses are human and thus have their own ideas that may not agree with others.
- Negotiation in conflict management consists of finding a resolution and working out the issues so that both parties feel respected and valued.
- Key elements in conflict resolution and negotiation to be used by staff and nurse leaders include empathy, anger management, social adaptation and listening skills.
Learning Nurse Nuggets: Managing Conflict

- When conflict arises, it is important to address it quickly.
- After determining the issue, ask the individuals what they would like to see as an outcome; perhaps they just want to talk or possibly they really need a resolution.
- If the issue warrants further discussion, bring the individuals together for a discussion. Assess whether:
  - There was a miscommunication.
  - There was a process issue.
  - The two personalities involved just do not work together.
- It is important to create a non-punitive environment to aid in open discussion and growth.
- Creating an open but confidential environment to deal with conflict and job difficulty are effective ways to reduce turnover.
- A specific issue such as an unfavorable job assignment or more complex issues such as unmet expectations can cause conflict and job dissatisfaction; it is important to address these issues quickly and effectively.
- Team effectiveness is enhanced through conflict resolution; there must be an emphasis on interpersonal skills, team communication and self-awareness.
- Nurse leaders must know their work environments and staff well to create a climate of openness and respect.

References

Avoiding Common Nursing Errors, Lisa Marcucci, MD, Editor, Lippincott Williams and Wilkins, 2010