Healthy Work Environment:
A Path to Quality Job Outcomes for Nurses

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ABSTRACT

A healthy work environment for nurses is critical to assuring the quality of care received by patients. It also plays a major role in fostering nurse satisfaction, retention, and performance. All of which boosts the financial sustainability of healthcare organizations. Maintaining a healthy workplace requires ongoing work. Numerous studies have demonstrated the relationship between improved results for nurses and a positive work environment, which is a decisive element for high-quality treatment. Such workspace has a bigger impact on nurses' job satisfaction and quality performance than do nurse characteristics or the types of hospitals or units. The key components of creating healthy work environments include effective communication, genuine cooperation, cost-efficient decision-making, adequate staffing, meaningful recognition, and authentic leadership. This is an auspicious and economical strategy for keeping nurses happy and, consequently, retained. This review, therefore, describe the importance of a healthy work environment to quality nursing care outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

An attractive and supportive work environment draws people close to their jobs, encourages them to stay in the labor force, and ensures effective performance. The aim of providing an attractive work environment is to provide employment and to provide staff members with an incentive to improve their retention. In addition, supportive work environments create conditions that encourage staff to perform well, making the best possible use of their knowledge, skills, expertise, and current resources to provide a high-quality health service [1].

A healthy work environment is therapeutic for patients and nurses. It promotes the involvement and organizational commitment of employees [2]. It is characterized by a high degree of confidence, appreciation, a community that encourages professional communication and cooperation, and emotional and physical safety. Meanwhile, increased

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workloads, lack of support from leadership, and lack of collaboration among nurses and physicians have been cited as factors that make the work environment unhealthy and contribute to nursing burnout [3].

Workload and working conditions have an impact on staff morale, patient care, and patient safety [4]. Given the foregoing, proper psychological working conditions should be implemented, with strong hospital management and supervisory support, as they play a crucial role in difficult situations [5-7]. Several studies have shown positive effects of a healthy work environment on the level of care when the nursing practice climate is well-structured and the ratio of patients to nurses is reduced [8, 9]. If nurses were to describe their work environment, the thoughts of an unsafe work environment would come to their minds first.

A healthy work environment is essential for the satisfaction and retention of nurses, the well-being of patients, and the quality of care, which play a fundamental role in the financial stability of healthcare organizations, if not ensured, it leads to high turnover rates, and economic loss [10, 11]. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) and the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) focus on fostering healthy nursing work environments to enhance patient safety and care quality. An initiative that distinguishes hospitals by having a safe work atmosphere and good nursing and patient results is the Magnet Designation, a performance-driven recognition for healthcare organizations with exemplary nursing care [12].

To Nightingale, a healthy work environment makes patients feel warmth and happiness, and all medical staff should have the required infrastructure to build 'healing spaces' [13]. This requires activities to improve the health and well-being of nurses, the quality of patient care and social outcomes, and the highest level of organizational performance. Attractive working conditions enable nurses to provide high-quality care, prevent them from being distracted and disconnected from their profession, and even leave [14].

A healthy work environment is safe, encouraging, and rewarding [15]. For nurses, it should allow good personal relationships, an effective management style, a reasonable work schedule, agreement between the increased workload of nurses and the skill mix of nurses, sufficient time to fulfill the needs of patients, professional autonomy, adequacy of resources, and opportunities for professional advancement [16].

Because of the above facts, this paper aims at enlightening nurses, nursing leaders, and senior management groups across fields of practice (on what? You did not indicate what you want to enlighten nurse leaders on before going into how you will enlighten them. You need to complete a thought process before jumping into another theme. Clearly state what you want to enlighten people on before stating how you plan to do the enlightening) through effective, productive staffing and workload strategies to create healthier work environments.

For healthcare organizations, such activities are important, as they facilitate continuity of patient care and can eventually enhance positive patient experiences and outcomes.

1. The Healthy work environment for nurses

The Nurses' Bill of Rights created by the American Nurses Association outlines best practices for nursing environments that benefit healthcare providers and patients. The ANA said the document provides a framework for organizations to develop policies and processes on fundamental rights at work [17].

The document says nurses have the right to:

- Practice in a manner that fulfills their obligation to society and those receiving nursing care
- Fair compensation commensurate with their education, preparation, knowledge, experience, and responsibilities
- A safe working environment for themselves and their patients
- Negotiate the conditions of their employment as individuals or groups
- Freely and openly advocate for themselves and their patients without fear of retribution [18].
- A workplace that supports ethical practice according to the ANA's code of ethics
- Practice in an environment within their legal scope and professional standards [17].

A healthy working environment (HWE) encourages nurses to achieve the highest level of compassionate patient care at work [19]. It helps managers and employees to strengthen their environment, and become more enthusiastic, confident, and happy. In addition, the workforce is more stable, dedicated, and efficient [20].
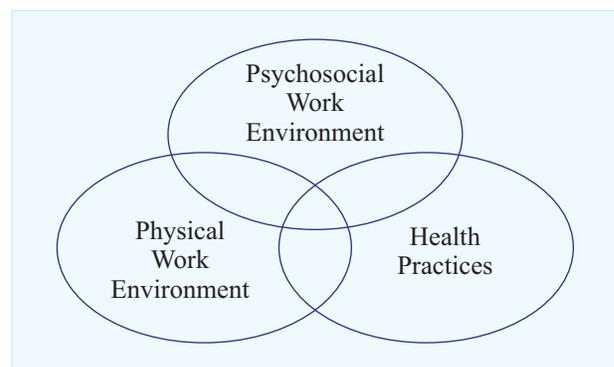

Figure 1: Spheres of the healthy work environment [20]

Pravamayee further described the characteristics that constitute good, healthy working relationships, including:

- Trust
- Mutual
- Mindfulness

- Welcoming Diversity [20].
- Open Communication
- Cooperation

2. Nurses' roles in creating and promoting a healthy work environment

Nursing workplaces can be stressful, overwhelming, and take on negative energy. It may also create tension not only among nurses but also among patients.

Here are five ways by which nurses could promote positive change within the workplace:

- *Demonstrate gratitude:* The nurse needs to recognize others for contributing to her success and accomplishments. By showing appreciation for their hard work and contributions, she (there are male nurses too) establishes respect and provides a sense of worth for her co-workers.

- *Utilize individual strengths:* Rather than expecting everyone to do it all, the nurse should maximize the team's efforts by identifying and utilizing each co-worker's strengths, sharing her strengths with her team, and validating other nurses for theirs.

- *Do not take workplace conflicts personally:* Conflicts or disagreements will occur from time to time, and one must not make a bigger deal of them than necessary. Being a nurse is not about an individual's ego, but about working together to achieve the best solutions and quality care for the patient.

- *Offer solutions to recurring issues:* Instead of merely venting with other nurses about the problems that arise on the job, try to solve the ongoing conflicts either via suggestions in daily meetings or by submitting a formal request to management, the nurse will help create a more positive work environment rather than adding to the tension.

- *Be a positive role model:* Nothing sends a stern message to fellow nurses and supervisors than one's actions. If the nurse consistently demonstrates professionalism, effective communication, prudent nursing practice, teamwork, and accountability, she will set the tone for how others should follow [21].

Others include:

- Enabling nurses to practice at the level to which they were trained and licensed
- Supporting a culture that values learning and educational advancement
- Collaboration within the interdisciplinary team
- Nurses can improve patient care by ensuring everyone

works to full scope with interdisciplinary and leadership support [22].

Recent studies in Jordan and Nigeria also attest to the fact that leadership plays a role in creating a healthy work atmosphere by improving the importance of work, allowing employees to engage in work-related decisions, expressing confidence in the ability of employees to perform at a high level, promoting the achievement of goals, and providing autonomy [23, 24], enhancing the working conditions of nurses, attracting and retaining more nurses to the profession can be accomplished. These will minimize nurses' burnout and lead to continuing efforts to reduce nursing shortages and increase the standard of care delivered [23, 24].

3. Global practices and strategies to promote a healthy work environment for nurses

The American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN) has put forward six standards to establish and sustain a healthy work environment [19]. They include:

- *Skilled communication:* The nurse is expected to be proficient in both communication and clinical skills.

- *True collaboration:* she should be relentless in pursuing and fostering true collaboration

- *Effective decision making:* to maintain a healthy work environment, there is a need to be committed to making policy, directing and evaluating clinical care, and leading organizational operations.

- *Appropriate staffing:* staffing must ensure the effective match between patient needs and nurse competencies.

- *Meaningful recognition:* The staff must be recognized and recognize others for the value each brings to the work of the organization

- *Authentic leadership:* fully embrace the imperative of a healthy work environment, authentically live it, and engages others in its achievement [25].
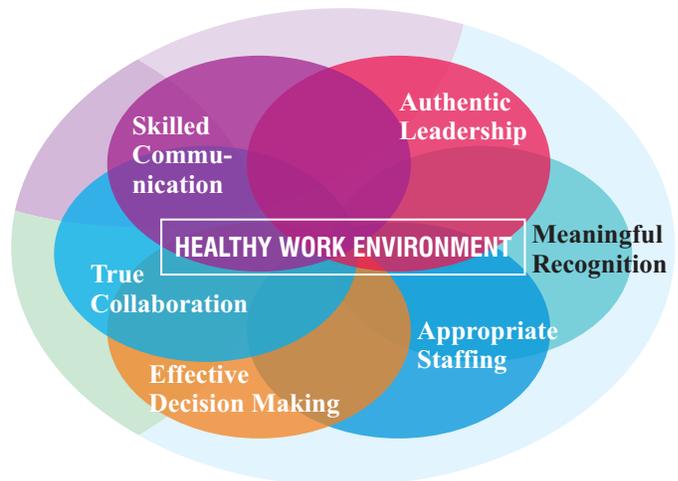

Figure 2: Strategies to promote a healthy work environment [19]

Individuals must look out for these standards in the workplace. Implementing them can assist in reducing staff turnover, creating job satisfaction, and improved patient outcomes.

These criteria have provided a structure and guidelines to help nurses, and promote patient care outcomes for healthcare organizations. Based on these, some unique approaches are summarized to support the caring culture of organizations and the nurses' roles from the viewpoints of nurses, nurse leaders, and organizations.

Strategies from nurses' perspectives

To act as frontrunners in healthcare, nurses should;

- foster self-care, find ways to rejuvenate effectively, and give oneself and others, including patients and colleagues, the best;
- create resilience, check for resources that can help to remain positive;
- maintain good personal relationships at all costs; and
- be a partner and agent of progress in improving work conditions for nurses

Strategies from nurse leaders' perspectives

Nurse leaders should support the success, quality of patient care, and safe work environments of their fellow nurses [26]. For prudent leading, nurse leaders need to:

- be inspirational, inspiring nurses' sense of commitment, engagement, and enthusiasm;
- be proactive, not reactive, and willing to be risk-takers in innovation and making changes;
- be mindful of safety for all;
- adopt a positive management style;
- make the workplace encouraging and rewarding for all staff;
- be reasonable in planning work schedule and staff allocation; and
- lead with a vision, motivating others to rise to the occasion.

Strategies from organizations' perspectives

This review shows that a positive organizational culture filled with support and cooperation between teams is a cornerstone for a healthy work environment [26]. To establish a healthy nurse work environment, healthcare organizations need to:

- Have a clear organizational vision and mission, providing direction and guidance for the priorities of organizations;
- Contributing to progress and empowerment, making workers feel like they are part of the business and what they do is important and appreciated;

- Provide adequate and appropriate infrastructures for nurses to work with; and
- Create a community of caring, building a creative atmosphere rich in caring at the micro and macro levels [26].

5. Changes that are needed in practice, education, and policy to create a healthy working environment:

- Efficient and collaborative methods for workload planning and management;
- True and reliable methods and methodologies for forecasting, calculating, and validating the workload in nursing; relevant measures of nursing productivity;
- Fair job assignments to ensure that nurses do not operate beyond their capacity for productivity;
- Sufficient tools to carry out the work of nurses;
- Adequate personnel to perform all of the core elements required;
- Focusing more on implementing known strategies to alleviate burnout, including adequate nurse staffing and limiting the number of hours worked per shift [3];
- An acceptable combination of skilled nursing workers practicing to their full extent; and
- Opportunities for growth and education to retain and strengthen technical skills (Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario [27].

6. Recommendations for improving the health of nurses' work environment

The recommendations are categorized as follows:

Organization recommendations

- To ensure staffing that supports the delivery of healthy, knowledgeable, culturally responsive, and ethical services and positive patient results, organizations should develop a workforce plan.
- Safe nursing staffing practices are to be carried out in conjunction with nursing personnel at the point of treatment (at the bedside), which may be a clinic, ward, home, or outreach center, by unit/operational nurse leaders who have the necessary expertise, professional judgment, skills, and authority.
- To provide healthily, quality, patient-centered care, the board, administrative leadership, and human resources must work collaboratively with point-of-care leaders to ensure efficient staffing systems, appropriate care delivery models, and adequate nurses in proper categories are in place.
- The budget of organizations needs to include adequate nurses in proper categories to facilitate quality delivery,

safe patient care, positive patient care outcomes, and reduce the financial costs associated with overtime.

- A consistent communication strategy to resolve staffing needs in unplanned circumstances, such as pandemics; code whites, browns, and blacks; and other situational disasters, should be developed and employed by organizations and those responsible for staffing

- To help them understand staffing needs, and their effects on intermediate and distal outputs, organizations need to establish a systematic structure, such as the model of patient care delivery systems (PCDSM).

- To promote personalized care and provide adequate numbers of nurses in proper categories to ensure stable, consistent patient care, organizations can use accurate and valid tools to help assess patient needs and workload.

- To promote secure, productive workload processes, organizations can use electronic health records (EHRs) and other integrated systems as needed.

- When undertaking staff planning, nurse leaders must make evidence-based decisions on staff distribution by rank for safe and efficient patient care.

Individual recommendations

- Nurses responsible for their unit or team's day-to-day staffing decisions should demonstrate skills that encourage a holistic approach to personnel handling, such as awareness of patient needs; team knowledge, including comprehension of individual levels of skills, communication skills, versatility, skills, and scope of practice; and an understanding of the organization

- The protocols for reporting and documenting inappropriate staffing practices as per the requirements of regulatory bodies and organizational policies must be recognized and applied by all nurses.

- Point-of-care nurses must be involved in staffing decisions at all levels using collaborative governance processes.

- Point-of-care nurses must also demonstrate an understanding of the procedures and processes of organization and unit staffing through the following: daily attendance, strategic holiday scheduling, a notice of sick days, and knowledge of the responsibilities of inter-professional and intra-professional team members.

- The establishment and functioning of a staffing committee with representatives from all units/teams/areas, including management, and with a majority of members consisting of point-of-care registered nurses, should be endorsed by nursing leaders.

External/system recommendation

- Accreditation and certification bodies should provide evidence-based metrics that represent best practices in the experience of patients and healthy, ethical, and high-quality nursing staff care.

Government recommendations

- Governments need to be dedicated to statutory security for workers who report on staffing activities that threaten the safety and quality of care.

- Governments must be committed to providing allocated financial resources and leadership to build healthy work environments that encourage safe nursing staffing practices, promote nurse retention, and contribute to positive patient outcomes.

Research recommendation

- To continue to study the effects and results of staffing on nurses, patients, organizations, and programs, funding agencies need to support nurse researchers.

7. Summary and Conclusion

A healthy work environment is needed to achieve quality care outcomes for nurses. The success of this depends on the collaborative efforts of the individual nurse, the nurse leaders, other healthcare team members, the institutions/organization, and the government. Everything revolves around skilled communication, inter-professional collaboration, shared decision-making, appropriate staffing, meaningful recognition, and authentic leadership. If these are considered, they can boost nurse engagement and retention and in turn affect patient outcomes in terms of satisfaction and reduced rate of readmission. Therefore, it is the responsibility of both individuals and the entire organization to assess the work environment, identify areas that need improvement, and collaborate with others to implement the needed changes and make things better.

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