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Hidden issues in research and policy on lateral violence in nursing: impetus for a new approach to nursing's dark secret

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Statement of the Problem: Nurses experience aggression in the workplace more than twice as often as workers in other professions. The phenomenon of society's care-givers intentionally hurting their own kind would seem to be an oxymoron, if it were not so widespread and long-standing. Nurse peers are found to be the most frequent perpetrators of bullying among nurse groups. Mistreatment of others occurs in all ranks of healthcare, but lateral violence in nursing (LVN) is of particular interest because it is not affected by hierarchical complexities. LVN harms nurses all over the world and redirects their energy from patient care to interpersonal drama. LVN is associated with higher rates of nurse attrition which fuels the nursing shortage and therefore is of particular concern for an aging society. LVN is common, complex, and continues despite decades of LVN research and policy development.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: A review of literature was conducted, yielding over 100 relevant, recent and classic publications from nursing and related fields. Findings were analyzed for potential misdirection and/or theoretical concerns.

Findings: Eight recurrent themes were identified and explored for effects on LVN practice and policy.

Conclusions & Significance: These findings point out the need to relook at nurse peer relationships as a whole. A grounded theory study is under way.

Biography

Maud Low is a Clinical Assistant Nursing Professor at University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her ten years teaching at UMass has included theory and clinical courses in obstetrical, psychiatric, community health, senior internship and physical assessment. Professor Low holds a masters' degree in Women's Health Nursing from Boston College, is a Certified OB/GYN Nurse Practitioner, and has published articles on nursing. Professor Low is currently clinically active as a psychiatric nurse. She served as an officer in AWHONN, reviewed for JOGNN, and presented at national conferences. Maud is a Certified Legal Nurse Consultant. Her PhD work is on bullying in nursing.

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