

Creating a Healthy Haven: The Key to Healthcare Workforce Stability

By Randi Boell



A healthy work environment has become the impetus for not only recruiting and retaining healthcare workers but is also the cornerstone for optimal patient care. As healthcare challenges continue to evolve, stay competitive in recruiting, retaining and protecting your team.

Creating a healthy work environment involves multiple factors, including but not limited to:

- Mutual respect and teamwork
- Psychological safety and Just Culture
- Decentralization and shared decision-making
- Mentorship and coaching
- Celebrating workplace goals and career milestones (celebrate whenever you can, big and small!)
- Aligning our values & our sense of purpose

In addition, promoting wellbeing and joy in the workplace are essential elements for a healthy work environment. The Institute of Healthcare Improvement (IHI) has four steps to ensure joy in the workplace (Sherman and Blum, 2019):

1. Ask your team members **“What matters most to you?”**
2. Seek the **“pebbles in the shoe”** that get in the way of having a good workday. Opportune times to have these discussions are during huddles, staff meetings, and 1:1s.
3. Share with team members at all levels of your organization **what can be done together** to commit to joy in the workplace. Joy at work is the responsibility of all.
4. **Pilot test changes** in the workplace that are intended to instill joy; make small scale changes and use PDSA cycles while also measuring progress.

While working through these four steps, consider IHI's nine critical elements of a joyful and engaged workforce (Sherman and Blum, 2019):

1. Fostering purpose and meaning in daily work
2. Providing an environment that supports autonomy, choice and flexibility
3. Ensuring physical and psychological safety

4. Rewarding and recognizing staff fairly and visibly
5. Measuring processes and outcomes and real-time feedback
6. Using proven methods to recognize opportunities for improvement and growth
7. Promoting teamwork and camaraderie
8. Having shared decision-making and clear communication
9. Promoting employee wellbeing and wellness

Indeed, implementing a wellbeing program can reduce, maybe even prevent, burnout. Bogue and Carter (2019) offer the following four concepts and strategies for promoting wellbeing in the workplace:

1. SPIR (religio-spiritual)- one of the most neglected areas
 - Offer chaplain or faith services to employees
 - Provide animal therapy via certified trainers
 - Facilitate mindfulness sessions
 - Create a Watson Room
 - Incorporate exposure to nature
2. RELA (socio-relational)
 - Ensure effective communication
 - Promote inclusion, and equal treatment
 - Maintain zero tolerance for incivility or bullying
 - Manage conflicts effectively
3. EMO (psycho-emotional)
 - Provide accessible (onsite if possible) EAP, stress management support and counseling
 - Conduct Schwartz Rounds
 - Recognize all staff across all shifts
 - Adjust leaders' hours to see and interact with all staff
 - Schedule debriefings 1-2 times per


- month so staff can process stressors
- Implement Code lavender after stressful events for staff
4. BIO (bio-physical)
- Address threats like patient loads, staffing, shift length, call practices and overtime (the study's identified threats to bio-physical)
 - Promote onsite or mobile bio-physical services, such as aromatherapy, therapeutic touch, reiki and massage
 - Provide healthy and fresh food options, especially for night and weekend workers (think what can go in vending machines)

Finally, because effective leadership has a fundamental impact on supporting the work environment, recruiting and retaining nurse leaders that embrace and foster these positive leadership approaches that propel healthy environments is monumental. Approach matters.

In summary, healthy work environments are necessary to improve team wellbeing, and higher nurse wellbeing leads to lower turnover and better patient outcomes (Bogue & Carter, 2019). Stay competitive by committing to these strategies. ■

References

- Bogue, R. J., & Carter, K. F. (2019). A model for advancing nurse wellbeing: Future directions for nurse leaders. *Nurse Leader*. 17(6), 526-53. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mnl.2019.09.011>
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