



Zero tolerance for bullying at home office and beyond

AS WE WELCOME VANESSA BURKOSKI as our association's new president this spring, I would like to take this opportunity to thank outgoing president, Rhonda Seidman-Carlson, for her outstanding leadership as we tackle several difficult and important issues at RNAO. In this column, I would like to particularly highlight Rhonda's role in addressing bullying in the workplace. Kudos, Rhonda for your courage to lead and to raise awareness that "...the decision to confront – and the responsibility to report – bullying lies with each and every one of us."

In January, Rhonda was invited by RNAO's Regions 6 and 7 to discuss colleague-to-colleague bullying and lateral violence. That event is a testament to the importance of this pervasive issue simply because of the outstanding response by nurses. Initially there were 30 registrants. That grew to 50, then 80. Ultimately, an astounding 170 nurses attended her presentation to learn about the role they can play in identifying and stopping bullying. Staying silent, Rhonda reminds all of us, "...amounts to condoning the very act we find abhorrent."

Through her important work, Rhonda has reminded us that we all need to help find solutions to this "war on the soul." She has done a commendable job defining what bullying is and is not. For RNAO, bullying is: "A form of repeated, persistent and aggressive behaviour directed at an individual(s) that

is intended to cause or ought to be known to cause fear and distress and/or harm to another person's body, feelings, self-esteem or reputation."

As RNAO's CEO, I have decided to follow Rhonda's lead and initiate honest and frank discussions at home office to ensure our "house" lives by one important rule: zero tolerance for aggression. For this, we have engaged in a mandatory education

"RNAO'S VALUABLE TOOLS TO ADDRESS THIS IMPORTANT ISSUE WILL BE SHARED WITH MEMBERS SO OTHERS CAN ADAPT THEM TO THEIR OWN WORKPLACES."

program for all 82 staff, followed by the immediate implementation of a mandatory policy on reporting. Two very capable and knowledgeable staff members are directing this initiative: Althea Stewart-Pyne, BPG program manager for healthy work environments, and Dolare Seran, HR manager. Althea's expertise lies in research and knowledge on what makes a healthy workplace. Dolare's expertise is in human resources management. Together, they are in a great position to lead this effort.

The mandatory education program, which took place in March, was split into three sessions. The first provided definitions and terminology on

workplace bullying and violence. We wanted to be clear what bullying is and is not. Staff can now recognize the potential for bullying within the work environment, its effects, and employer and employee obligations.

The second session touched on legislation in Ontario on violence and harassment, RNAO policies, and reporting procedures for incidents or complaints. The aim was to provide

staff with a better sense of the investigative procedures for incidents or complaints, and how to better prevent and manage bullying and harassment.

In the third and final session, conflict management was discussed, and tips were provided on how to talk to a bully. Resources were offered with additional information on customer service training, and tips on accessing the employee assistance program.

Implementation of the mandatory policy on reporting is next. There will also be additional policies to assist staff in reporting, including a complete follow up between the alleged bully and alleged victim.

Although RNAO has a policy on harassment in the workplace, it does not go far enough. We are committed to making it stronger and more focused.

Bullying can come from inside the workplace (management-to-staff, staff-to-management, management-to-management, and/or staff-to-staff) or outside (from anyone approaching RNAO for services, information, etc. or in an employee's home). While RNAO is implementing zero tolerance policies at home office, which also apply to anyone approaching RNAO for services or information, we cannot do the same when bullying takes place in someone's home or away from the office. That's why part of the policy is to ensure we always maintain an environment where people feel safe at work, and they can get the support they need if they choose to disclose.

RNAO's educational program, reporting policy, and other valuable tools to address this important issue will be shared with members so others can adapt them to their own workplaces. We will also update the association's *Managing and Preventing Violence in the Workplace* BPG so it has a higher focus on bullying.

Let's take real action so that bullying is eradicated in our workplaces, homes and society. Even one case of bullying is too many. **RN**

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