

Workplace Violence/ Disaster Management

Name:

Institution:

Date:

Alcohol abuse in the workspace is a reality that is statistically established: between ten to fifteen percent of nurses will abuse alcohol in a way that would jeopardize their professional well-being, and, even more importantly, the well-being of their patients(Servodidio, 2011). The nursing profession is among the top ten most afflicted with alcoholism. Nursing can be extremely rigorous and appalling; one comes into contact with (sometimes extreme) human suffering almost daily. It could especially take a toll psychologically on those caring for terminal patients, for example cancer, patients. Oncology nurses are known to be twice as likely to engage in binge drinking(Servodidio, 2011).

Nurses usually form a close-knit group; often identifying each other as friends even beyond the workplace. The nature of the relationship between nurses might propagate drinking behavior and cause them not to take appropriate action when it is necessary. A friend may not want to report a fellow colleague for fear that they might get them into trouble. Often the signs that someone needs help are there but are ignored by the colleague, until it gets to an extreme point where lives could be endangered. The nurses develop coping mechanisms such as denial. Alcoholic nurses do not fit the stereotypical alcoholic; they are usually hard-working, respected and highly achieved academically (graduating at the top of their classes). It is, therefore, even harder to spot an alcoholic nurse, or one that need help and is on the edge. In addition, alcohol consumption is a mostly tolerated or accepted form of behavior in modern society, blurring the line between proper consumption and alcoholism that is a call for help.

One way to make nurses recognize the severity of alcoholism and be more responsible towards their colleagues and patients is to change their perception of alcoholism. Alcoholism is not just a personal problem; an indication of a lack of control or a propensity to escapism. It is a progressive and chronic disease that affects more than eighteen million Americans. A nurse

would find it easier to confront a colleague with problem drinking if they thought of it as a disease rather than the result of personality attributes. An emphasis on treatability and help rather than disciplinary action would also make it easier for the nurse to seek help.

Alcoholism is costly to diagnose and treat. In addition, a nurse may find themselves in legal trouble, which would cost even more money. A loss of income and additional costs from counseling may mean financial ruin. The impairment of the nurse also means a loss for the employer as they need to be replaced, either permanently or temporarily as they undergo therapy. However, replacing a nurse is less costly to the employer than reserving their job, which means that the nurse is likely to lose their job. In total, it costs about \$54,000–\$95,300 to the parties involved (Servodidio, 2011).

The effects of an alcoholic nurse to the patient are disturbing; they might range from improper care, lowered quality of service or injury or death resulting from negligence or carelessness. The hospital might incur additional charges if the patient or family of the patient decides to sue the hospital for substandard care or negligence. A lot of human suffering could be caused by a drug overdose, underdose. A patient might miss scheduled appointments with doctors or other clinicians that may be life-threatening.

A hospital would no doubt shoulder the blame if the general public were to know of a case where a nurse caused loss, damage or suffering under alcoholic influence. The hospital's reputation would be tarnished; careers would potentially be ruined or tainted. In the public's eye, the hospital is responsible for the actions of its staff and the well-being of its staff and patients. Though this might be unfair to some parties, it is in a sense true. The hospital would potentially incur the biggest financial loss.

Personally, the nurse's career would be tainted; perhaps permanently if the case is severe. They are likely to lose their jobs and experience legal ramifications if any damage was caused or professional standards of conduct breached. It would potentially be psychologically and emotionally devastating to the nurse to have their career threatened or shattered after working so hard through school. One might even lose a true passion in their life. However, since alcoholism is recognized as a psychological disorder, it is unlikely that they would go to jail although some form of legal retribution would certainly follow.

It is important that the threat of alcoholism to the nursing profession be recognized in its severity and action taken to provide a preventive solution, such as education about the condition and how to identify it. A supportive environment and framework should be cultivated to avoid the need to turn to alcohol as a means for coping and comfort.

Works Cited

Servodidio, C. A. (2011). Alcohol Abuse in the workplace and Patient safety. *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing* , 143-145.