

WERE YOU LISTENING? Advocating for Patient Safety: As care receiver and provider Perspective

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Speaking up is important for patient safety, but healthcare professionals often hesitate to voice their concerns. If not speaking up can cause patient's harm, then why do healthcare staffs stay silent? The answer is not quite straightforward. This demonstrates the fact that many patients invest a lot of trust into nurses to give them the care they need, and to do so thoroughly. In order to maximize our impact, nurses must look beyond the bedside of individual patient care and recognize the aspects of healthcare that impact our patients on a much larger scale. How an organization responds to their staff speaking up is also a factor. Some nurses feel that raising concerns is a high-risk, low-benefit action, as nurses who speak up may be viewed as someone who wasn't a "team-player", and staff members who commit unsafe actions don't receive any consequences. Employees don't speak up they have fear of being viewed negatively, feel as if they don't have enough experience and feel that the organization hierarchy is intimidating or unsupportive.

When medical professionals are speaking up about safety concerns, the hospital, clinic, or other healthcare institution is able to detect, correct, and prevent unsafe work practices and complications during patients' stay. Staying silent has deeply negative effects including interfering with employees' psychological safety, decreasing teamwork among units, increasing employee turnover, ceasing opportunities to learn and improve, increasing costs, and ultimately increasing risks to patients. If medical professionals feel empowered to be bold and speak up when they identify opportunities to make changes in their environment, issues such as preventable medical errors in practice could be recognized and avoided. There are a variety of means in which medical professionals can increase their engagement and develop a more global approach to their profession. Medical professionals have an ability to truly make a much larger impact than they may realize, and that should inspire them to do so.

Therefore, healthcare organizations are obligated to encourage a culture of safety that values staff input. To achieve this, the organization should both encourage and empower speaking up in staff of all positions, and reinforce their commitment by responding to voiced concerns adequately. Tolerating unsafe and disrespectful behaviors will make it impossible for healthcare organizations to cultivate the norms and values necessary to provide safe, and efficient care for the patient, and a joyful work environment for the staff.