Work Shouldn’t Hurt: No Bullying!

This article is a follow up to the 7/12/17 “Working Together Works!” article in the Providence Newberg newsletter.

On July 6, a group of six nurses at Providence Newberg Medical Center (PNMC) met with their Chief Nursing Officer to address several years of bullying they had endured from their supervisor. The regional Human Resources department opened an investigation soon after this meeting. Each nurse was interviewed individually by the Senior Human Resources Consultant and were assured in writing that no adverse employment action would result against them due to their involvement in the investigation.

On July 24, we received word that this supervisor is no longer employed with Providence. This would not have happened if these nurses acted individually and/or without help from our union. These nurses felt like they could not address these serious issues alone. They experienced inappropriate behavior, humiliation, intimidation and abuse of power from this supervisor. Once they had the opportunity to compare stories and realize that there was a strong trend of harassment from this supervisor, they decided to act together in unison to support each other. They stuck together and will continue to work together to address other workplace issues.

“I am tremendously proud of these nurses and for the support of ONA throughout this process.”

- Valerie Whitmore, RN

The nurses involved in this action shared a common theme: each felt isolated, each felt targeted, each felt victimized. What bound them together in this action was reaching out to one another and using their ONA support as the springboard for action,” said Valerie Whitmore, RN, chair of ONA’s bargaining unit at PNMC. “We all know that we are stronger together, but finding the courage to reach out can be the hardest step to take. As a union of
nurses at PNMC, these nurses found their strength together, supported one another and took advantage of our union resources to advocate for themselves, their units and for the appropriate corrective action to be taken. It was this strength that resulted in the supervisor leaving their role, that reminded nurses there is power in numbers and that has inspired others to see the power to change the things rests in our hands. Organizing as a union is the essence of this strength and action. I am tremendously proud of these nurses and for the support of ONA throughout this process."

Bullying can have profound effects on an employee’s mental and physical health. It can cause stress-related health complications including hypertension, anxiety, depression, autoimmune disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder if not addressed promptly and properly.i

Harassment is a problem for employers too. It is typically the least-skilled employees who target the highest-performing workers because of a perceived threat they imagine.ii This leads to turnover of qualified staff who are not easy to replace.

Gary Namie, PhD, the Research Director of the Workplace Bullying Institute conducted a national survey in 2014. These were their findings:iii

- 27 percent of workers have current or past direct experience with abusive conduct at work
- 72 percent of the American public are aware of workplace bullying
- Bosses are still the majority of bullies
- 72 percent of employers deny, discount, encourage, rationalize or defend bullying behavior
- 93 percent of respondents support enactment of the Healthy Workplace Bill

Oregon is the fifth state to introduce a healthy workplace bill. In 2017, House Bill 2167iv and Senate Bill 292’ were filed in the Oregon House and Senate. Both create an “unlawful employment practice and violation of Oregon Safe Employment Act for creating or maintaining (an) abusive work environment”. This is applicable to both private and public sector employers.

Unfortunately neither of these bills passed this last session. They did not make it out of their committees. If you are interested in working on future legislation around this issue, please contact Political Organizer Chris Hewitt at Hewitt@oregonrn.org

You can find more resources on how to approach bullying in the workplace through ONA’s “Nurses and Bullying in the Workplace” resource guide available on ONA’s website: http://www.oregonrn.org/?451.

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iv Oregon House Bill 2167. https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2017R1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/HB2167/Introduced
v Oregon Senate Bill 292. https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2017R1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/SB292/Introduced

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Important ONA Nurse Resources

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