



# The Importance of Belonging for Nurse Well-Being and Patient Safety

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With the negative labeling of issues related to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), it is important to highlight the concepts within DEI as they relate to every human being interacting in society today. Belonging is a fundamental human need, and in the nursing environment, it plays a crucial role in shaping both individual nurse well-being and patient safety. A strong sense of belonging among nurses fosters a supportive workplace culture, enhances job satisfaction, and ultimately improves the quality of patient care. In contrast, a lack of belonging, such as bullying can lead to stress, burnout, and compromised patient outcomes.

For nurses, a sense of belonging is essential for mental and emotional resilience. Historically, in spite of being the “caring” profession, nurses have been expected to just “tough it out” or have “thick skin” when related to stressful issues. Feeling valued and supported by colleagues and leadership is conducive to stress reduction and the alleviation of burnout, which are prevalent issues in the profession today. Studies have shown that nurses who experience a strong sense of belonging are more engaged, motivated, and likely to remain in their roles, reducing staff turnover and creating team stability.

Additionally, belonging promotes open communication and collaboration, ensuring that nurses feel comfortable members of the team. Psychological safety is critical in a high-pressure environment where errors or missteps can have serious consequences. When nurses feel connected to their team, they are more likely to ask for support, share best practices, and maintain high standards of care.

A cohesive nursing team is directly linked with patient safety. When nurses feel a strong sense of belonging, they are more likely to work collaboratively, communicate effectively, and follow established protocols. Feeling free to ask questions, consult colleagues professionally or seek physical help, reduces the risk of errors, improves care delivery, and enhances overall patient outcomes.

When colleagues engage in bullying, exclusion or other acts of aggression, they create an unstable environment for patient care. Lack of a feeling of belonging can contribute to disengagement and decreased morale. This can cause anxiety, a lack of focus and attention, leading to mistakes and oversights in patient care. In environments where nurses feel isolated or undervalued, they may hesitate to speak up about safety concerns, increasing the risk of adverse events. A supportive and inclusive workplace fosters a culture of accountability and continuous improvement,

ensuring that patient safety remains a top priority.

To enhance belonging in the nursing environment, health-care institutions must take proactive steps, such as:

- **Encouraging Team Collaboration:** Regular team-building activities, mentorship programs, and shared decision-making help build strong relationships among nurses.
- **Promoting Inclusivity and Diversity:** Ensuring that all nurses, regardless of their background, feel valued and respected enhances workplace cohesion.
- **Providing Emotional and Professional Support:** Offering resources such as counseling, peer support groups, and leadership training helps nurses feel supported in their roles.
- **Recognizing Contributions:** Acknowledging nurses’ hard work and accomplishments fosters a sense of appreciation and belonging.
- **Adopting a policy of acceptance:** There should be no tolerance for bullying or exclusion of any kind and this should be addressed directly in the policies of the institution, including a process for reporting and discipline.

Nurse well-being must be a PRIORITY in the work environment. We cannot expect nurses who are not cared for to deliver quality care. Belonging is a key factor in maintaining both individual nurse well-being and patient safety. Creating a culture of caring must be more than words in a company mission - it is an imperative for the mental health of caregivers and the safety of the patients they care for. ■

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