

MODULE 1: HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENTS

Module Objectives:

1. Define healthy work environment.
2. Explain the relevance of a healthy work environment to elder abuse.
3. Review tools to avoid and manage caregiver burnout.
4. Explain how you can contribute to improving and enriching your work environment.

What's a Healthy Work Environment?

*“A practice setting that maximizes the health and well-being of all staff, quality resident outcomes, organizational performance and societal outcomes”.*¹

Why are we concerned with a Healthy Work Environment?

Work environments are known to affect:

- Organizational culture
- Staff turnover
- Workplace violence
- Team leadership

A healthy work environment can improve:

- The quality of the work environment in which staff work
- The quality of care provided to residents
- The quality of life of the resident

Learning Challenge

There is a growing understanding of the relationship between the work environment and the patient/resident outcomes within the long term care sector.

With that being said, we challenge you, the learner, to **make note of how the different aspects of a healthy work environment correlate with the other subjects addressed in this workbook.**

Work Environments, Stress, and Elder abuse

Several characteristics of the Nursing Home's environment have been identified that may serve as risk factors in the development of abusive behaviors:

- Nature of policies
- Nature of staff training
- Staffing levels
- Work-related stress
- Types of residents in your care



An Exercise in Self-Awareness and Reflection

1. Think of an instance where you were faced with difficult emotions (stress, anger, fear, sadness) which negatively impacted your work performance.
 - What were the key elements that shaped your negative action(s)?
 - How did your negative behavior affect your work environment? (residents, co-workers, etc.)
 - What would you have done differently?
2. Now think of a similar emotional situation where you were able to rein your negative sentiments so as to not affect your work.
 - What were the key elements that helped you maintain your professionalism?
 - How did your positive behavior affect your work environment?
 - What were the key differences between the negative and positive situations?

What is caregiver burnout?

“A state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion that may be accompanied by a change in attitude -- from positive and caring to negative and unconcerned.”³

The symptoms of caregiver burnout are similar to the symptoms of stress and depression. They include:

- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed
- Feeling blue, irritable, hopeless, and helpless
- Changes in appetite, weight, or both
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Getting sick more often
- Feelings of wanting to hurt yourself or the person for whom you are caring
- Emotional and physical exhaustion
- Excessive use of alcohol and/or sleep medications
- Irritability



Food for Thought

Several researchers who have taken a closer look at the process by which caregiver stress turns into violence have observed intervening factors or links between stress and violence. Bendek and his colleagues (1992), for example, postulated that stress, in and of itself, does not cause caregivers to become abusive; rather it leads to “mood disturbances” which may lead to abuse. It is these mood disturbances that culminate in mistreatment.²

What can I do to prevent or reduce stress and caregiver burnout?

- Talk to a doctor or someone you trust
- Try to eliminate or reduce the amount of personal stress you bring to work
- Live a healthier lifestyle
- Take advantage of available resources and tools such as:
 - Stress Indicators Questionnaire (*APPENDIX A*)
 - Caregiver Abuse Screen (CASE) (*APPENDIX B*)
 - NBANH Wellness program (*APPENDIX C*)
 - LifeWorks® Employee Assistance Program (EAP) (*APPENDIX D*)
 - U-First Training (*APPENDIX E*)

Useful Tools

The tools mentioned in this section are meant to be aides to assist you in:

- Assessing the areas of your life that cause you stress.
- Identifying whether you (or perhaps a co-worker) are demonstrating stress-related behavior that can potentially lead to abuse.
- Partaking in health and wellness activities with your peers.
- Getting professional help such as counselling and expert advice on how to maintain a healthy lifestyle.
- Gaining the skills required to manage the stress related to providing care to people with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias.

What can you do to create a healthy work environment?

Within your team:

- Mutual respect
- Trust
- Openness
- Communication
- Cooperation

All staff work in teams and work together; demonstrating respect for colleagues and resident, trust, open communication, cooperation will yield improved collaboration and team work; thus creating a healthy work environment.

Your professional identity:

- Make use of educational resources
- Share your ideas
- Think about your strengths and areas for improvement
- Provide your input into decisions
- Get involved

By increasing professionalism in your practice, you are contributing to a healthier work environment for yourself, and your colleagues.

Diversity:

- Be open minded and respectful of all colleagues
- Be co-operative with one another
- Refuse to participate in discrimination, harassment, gossiping and bullying

Many different cultures can be seen throughout any long term care setting. Welcoming these differences involves each individual to develop competencies in embracing diversity.

Module Key Points:

1. Promoting a healthy work environment is important in providing the best possible care to your patients.
2. Although there is not one specific set of contributors to elder abuse, your work environment can greatly affect how you care for your patients.
3. There is an array of tools and resources at your disposal to help you address stress and a healthy lifestyle.
4. Your contribution to a healthy work environment improves not only your wellbeing, but that of your coworkers and patients.

References:

- 1- Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (2008). *Workplace Health, Safety and Well-being of the Nurse*. Toronto, Canada: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario.
- 2- Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (2008). *Workplace Health, Safety and Well-being of the Nurse*. Toronto, Canada: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario.
- 3- WebMD (2012). *Heart Disease and Caregiver Burnout*. <http://www.webmd.com/heart-disease/guide/heart-disease-recognizing-caregiver-burnout>