



## Stand up to bullies

**A**t some point, most of us have encountered a bully—most commonly when we were kids. You might think that as we get older, bullying wouldn't be a problem we have to deal with. Unfortunately, that's not the case. In the healthcare field, bullying can be even worse than it was when we were children.

Bullying in health care takes many different forms, including fighting among different types of clinicians, managers bullying subordinates, peer-to-peer bully-

ing and, most commonly, specialists bullying other specialists. Years ago when I realized my dream of becoming a wound care specialist, I thought other specialists would be relieved I was on board to help with the overwhelming task of spreading wound care knowledge and healing wounds. But I found out quickly that I was pretty much alone with those thoughts, and my first encounter with wound care bullies occurred.

I began to ask myself: What did I do wrong? Why are they slamming me? What did I do to them? They don't even know me; they've never even talked to me. This may sound familiar to many of you, whether you're a wound care specialist, an ostomy specialist, or a diabetes or lymphedema specialist.

Workplace bullying is defined as repeated, unreasonable actions by individuals (or a group) directed toward an employee (or group of employees) that are intended to intimidate, degrade, humiliate, or undermine. Bullying occurs for many reasons; these reasons almost always include insecurity, competition, and the desire to feel more powerful and be in control.

So how do we deal with the bullies?

- Follow the Golden Rule: Treat others as you'd like others to treat you. Don't stoop to the bully's level.
- Stay calm and rational. Don't get emotional. Bullies take pleasure in manipulating people emotionally.
- Don't lose your confidence or blame yourself. Recognize that this isn't about



you; it's about the bully. Be proud and confident in your certification credential.

- Focus on your purpose—to provide safe, competent, high-quality care to every patient.
- Document the bullying incident. Start a diary detailing the nature of the bullying, including dates, times, places, what was said or done, and who was present. Start a file with copies of anything in print that shows harassment and bullying; hold onto copies of documents that contradict the bully's accusations against you.
- If the bullying behavior compromises patient safety and care, report the bully.

Stopping all bullying in health care may seem like an insurmountable goal, but I

believe that together we can try to stop the bullying cycle in our specialty. By setting the example and supporting each other, we can turn the focus back to healing and caring for our patients as a team, not as one practitioner against the world.

Actions speak louder than words. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, *"What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say."*

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