

## **Courageous conversations: Fostering a healthy work environment for health professionals – Carolyn Plummer**

### Objectives

Workplace conflict in the health sector can lead to horizontal violence, which affects not only health professionals but also patients. Horizontal violence includes behaviors such as bullying, intimidation, and coercion, which cause decreased work satisfaction and productivity, and increased absenteeism and turnover. Implementing healthy work environments (HWEs) and building a culture of safety for health professionals is key to ensuring quality care. Courageous Conversations (CC) is an innovative, multi-faceted, interprofessional HWE program designed to address workplace conflict by building organization and system capacity and support for engaging teams and leaders in courageous conversations about ways to improve work environments and enhance patient care.

### Methods

The CC program includes four elements:

- Team-based peer-led CC Workshops in which point-of-care staff discuss ways to create and sustain a safe HWE, using an appreciative inquiry approach.
- Facilitator training to equip staff with the skills needed to lead CC Workshops and to become resource persons for workplace conflict issues.
- Seminars to provide healthcare leaders with tools and strategies for addressing incivility and respect related challenges in the workplace.
- Toolkits for leaders and staff to help foster HWEs.

Evaluation entailed a multi-pronged approach. Interviews were conducted prior to and following implementation. Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered via three surveys that evaluated participants' perspectives of team wellness, interprofessional collaboration (IPC), and workplace conflict. Participant feedback on the usefulness of the program in helping to improve work environments was also evaluated.

### Results

The CC program has been implemented across a variety of units, organizations, and health sectors, reaching a total of 900 participants to date. Results have been overwhelmingly positive, and demonstrate that participants have applied what they learned from the workshops in their day-to-day practice. Overall, there has been consistent and sustained improvement from baseline to post-implementation in the areas of team wellness and IPC, and workplace conflict has trended downward following implementation. These findings have been used to identify specific strategies to help improve teamwork and support HWEs for healthcare teams across a variety of organizations and sectors.

## Conclusion

The CC program is an exemplar for innovation spread. It began as an innovative project initiated by a nurse who wanted to reduce conflict on her unit. It evolved from there to spread across an organization and across professions; partnerships were then established with other organizations to test the program in different health settings and sectors across a health system. The success of the CC program demonstrates its potential to be implemented multiple healthcare settings, leading to systemic capacity for fostering HWEs and supporting quality care.