

How to prevent bullying in your pharmacy

Workplace bullying is on the rise and can cost you dearly if left ignored.



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Recent studies show that close to four per cent of Australians experience bullying in the workplace. In monetary terms, this can cost a single pharmacy up to \$20,000 per employee when you take absenteeism, staff turnover, loss of productivity, profitability and potential litigation into account.

Types of bullying

Workplace bullying occurs when an employee is intentionally hurt by another employee/manager or a group of employees/managers. Bullying of a psychological or social nature can include verbal insults about work performance and personal life (eg. religion, culture, family, gender, sexual orientation, education or background). Bullying can also be expressed in the form of intimidation, exclusion from others or delegating of unpleasant tasks that are unrelated to the employee's role. In some pharmacies, we have seen employees bully others through withholding information that they needed to get their job done or through appointing unreasonable workloads to be completed without the appropriate support or timeframes.

Bullying of a physical nature includes but is not limited to shoving, pushing, tripping, grabbing, sexual harassment, threatening, attacking, or coaxing or forcing employees to do something humiliating to be accepted by others. In

most cases, the offenders are not as tough as they appear to be and display this kind of behaviour because of their own issues which are often related to low self-esteem or they may have been a victim of abuse themselves.

Bullying vs conflict

Workplace bullying can often be mistaken for conflict, performance feedback or a single incident of workplace harassment. Disagreements/conflict occurs in every pharmacy but should never escalate to bullying/harassment. Similarly, performance feedback is not considered to be bullying behaviour as long as the feedback is constructively given to improve work performance without threatening or humiliating someone.

Long-term effects

Bullying behaviour in the pharmacy affects employees on multiple levels. It can damage an employee's confidence and self-esteem, affecting their physical health (causing insomnia, depression, anxiety and stress) and even making them incapable of continuing to work. This inevitably impacts on all facets of their life and personal relationships.

In the workplace, bullying behaviour can

decrease productivity/profitability levels, deteriorate trusting relationships with staff, increase absenteeism and staff turnover which will affect the reputation, longevity and success of your

pharmacy. Bullying also increases costs associated with workers compensation (eg. counselling and medication claims), legal costs, recruitment expenses and training of new staff.



Preventing bullying in your pharmacy

It is easier to prevent bullying behaviour than it is to mediate and intervene where bullying patterns have evolved over time. Here are seven easy steps you can take to ensure the wellbeing of your staff and minimise inappropriate behaviour in your pharmacy:

1. Identify the signs

Signs of bullying include increased absenteeism, sudden deterioration in work performance, unusual behavioural changes (eg. depression, moodiness) and/or unexplained requests to swap shifts to avoid working with a particular colleague. Look out for these signs and document the frequency of occurrences to see recurring patterns.

2. Recognise contributing factors

New employees or those who belong to a minority group in the community (for reasons such as background or

beliefs) may be more likely to experience bullying. It is important that your pharmacy does not condone teasing or practical jokes that can lead to bullying behaviour.

Other contributing factors include staff shortages, which lead to increased pressure/stress levels and employees overloading others to avoid being overworked themselves. Ensure all position descriptions for staff are clearly defined with unambiguous responsibilities and reporting structure. Do you have effective management plans in place to lead, inspire and empower your team? It might be a good idea to devise regular anonymous feedback forms and exit interviews to see how your current team view management. This will give you the intelligence to further develop specific areas in need of improvement.

3. Develop an anti-bullying culture

It is essential to create a supportive and comforting culture within your pharmacy. This should be reflected in effective performance management/feedback, and fair and reasonable treatment of all staff. Does your pharmacy represent open communication and foster positive relationships between all staff members?

4. Create a code of conduct

Irrespective of the size of your pharmacy, all employers should have a code of conduct in place that employees are inducted through and can access at all times. This sets the standard for all staff to follow and adhere to.

5. Provide ongoing training

A code of conduct is only effective when it's implemented – train your staff on what is expected of them and the consequences they can face for

intolerable behaviour. It is important that employees are shown how to recognise signs of bullying, who to turn to and what steps to take in such a situation.

6. Take complaints seriously

Encourage employees to report all complaints relating to bullying or any other inappropriate behaviour. All employees should feel reassured that their complaints will be taken seriously and dealt with immediately in confidence, without affecting their existing position or relationship with their employer or colleagues.

7. Monitor effectiveness

With the above steps taken, any cases of bullying behaviour should be eliminated or resolved. If the actions taken to resolve bullying behaviour have not been successful, your processes may need to be revised and improved for effectiveness. **R**