



## What Would Joan Do?

Vol. 8 • Issue 19 • Page 15

### What Would Joan Do?

Nurses at Fletcher Allen Health Care, Burlington, VT, adapt the qualities of one of their own to quell horizontal violence

By Mari K. Cordes, BS, RN

Horizontal violence can be manifested by overt actions — yelling, physical assault or sexual harassment, for example — and probably more frequently by covert, or more passive, behaviors such as sarcasm, condescension, undermining and ignoring.

In medicine, this is described as "medical intimidation," and can occur between any strata within the organization. The effects can be devastating and range in severity of impact, usually upon group and individual morale and productivity by causing feelings of disrespect and devaluation.

The Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP) noted in a 2004 study, 40 percent of clinicians said they avoided confronting intimidating colleagues about potential or actual medication errors.<sup>1</sup> Recent evidence now supports the theory that medical intimidation directly correlates to an increase in medical errors.<sup>2</sup>

### **New Standard Coming**

The Joint Commission is paying attention. Beginning in January 2009, hospitals will be held to a new leadership standard addressing "disruptive and inappropriate behaviors," and will be required to develop codes of conduct with definitions and an implementation process for managing these behaviors, said Mark R. Chassin, MD, president of the Joint Commission.<sup>1</sup>

"The data is clear that certain members of the team don't play well with other members of the medical team," said Gerald B. Hickson, MD, director of the Center for Patient and Professional Advocacy at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Nashville, TN. "We've dealt more effectively with drugs and alcohol than we have dealt with the kicking, spitting and cussing."<sup>1</sup>

### **Raising Awareness**

Recently, members of the IV Therapy department at Fletcher Allen Health Care, Burlington, VT, developed a creative intervention to raise awareness about horizontal violence that provided staff members with an effective tool to support them in taking responsibility for their own behavior.

During a discussion about less-than-positive behaviors within the IV department, one team member turned to another and said, "I need to be more like you, Joan." Joan consistently models kindness, equanimity and integrity, does not gossip and communicates effectively. From that comment grew a departmental celebration of Joan as an ideal toward which to aspire. The celebration included a "Be Joan" day with cake, lunch and handcrafted buttons for staff that said "BE JOAN."

The Be Joan campaign had a positive and lasting impact upon staff members, and also on patients. Several patients — a few of whom were rather grumpy — said they wanted to be like Joan, too. They were given Be Joan buttons and subsequently changed their affect.

### **Reasons for Success**

The success of this campaign is attributable to several factors, including spontaneity, individual

ownership of the intervention and follow through, and identifying and honoring a real-life example for staff members to reflect upon.

And in the spirit of avoiding unhealthy sanctification of Joan, her husband stated he'd also like to meet that Joan!

References for this article can be accessed at [www.advanceweb.com/nurses](http://www.advanceweb.com/nurses). Click on Education, then References.

*Mari K. Cordes is nurse educator for IV Therapy at Fletcher Allen Health Care, Burlington, VT.*

Copyright ©2015 Merion Matters

2900 Horizon Drive, King of Prussia, PA 19406 • 800-355-5627

Publishers of ADVANCE Newsmagazines

[www.advanceweb.com](http://www.advanceweb.com)