

## Professional Lead Team Blog series

### Civility saves lives

Sheila Doughty - February 2020

*“A medical environment where staff are good to each other is a safer one ... And there’s research to back it up.”(3)*

Several times over the last few weeks I have come across tweets, podcasts and articles about the impact of INCIVILITY on patient safety in the NHS. Having spent nearly 35 years working in hospital and community teams I have witnessed this for myself so thought I would pull together some resources to share in this blog.



I first came across this concept in a Ted Talk on Twitter(1). Chris Turner, an emergency medicine consultant, gave a 15 minutes talk “When rudeness in teams turns deadly” about how our behaviour impacts on our team and the effect that has on patients (see link below). Alison Hawes, our Freedom to Speak Up Guardian (FTSUG) also talks about low level incivility being central to many issues brought to her over the last year in SCFT.

The RCOG winter magazine 2018 includes an article on Civility (3): Chris Turner looked at research into how colleagues in healthcare settings treat each other, and the word ‘civility’ came up time and time again. “That’s the word in the literature: it sits nicely with ‘professionalism’,” he says. “You could use ‘kindness’ or ‘respect’ but in the end kindness is a virtue whereas civility is a behaviour.” And that means there is scope to change how civil people are to each other – if you can persuade them to make a conscious decision about how they behave.



Evidence from this article shows, when someone is rude to a colleague:

- ✚ There is a 61% reduction in the recipient’s cognitive ability

- ✚ Staff are 50% more likely to miss a calculation error
- ✚ There is a 50% reduction in willingness to help others both from the recipient and others who observed the incivility.

## So what is Incivility?



This screen shot taken from a You tube video produced by Epsom and St Heliers NHS trust(2), describes the multiple types of behaviour that are observed in the workplace. Although behaviour such as tutting, eye rolling, gossiping and being unhelpful are often described as mild – moderate incivility, the impact can be

enormous. The video, made by staff, show clearly how “throw away” comments made by busy people can significantly impact on a person’s feeling of self-worth and confidence.

98% NHS staff have experienced some form of Incivility in the workplace (2) and the impact on how we feel at work is huge. Words such as worthless, incompetent, belittled, upset, downhearted, unimportant are all used to describe this feeling



## However: Active kindness is contagious

### For every act of incivility there is an act of kindness

Active kindness shows that you care and support others and demonstrates sensitivity and thoughtfulness. Simply put, kindness is being nice to others. As you examine kindness further, a number of important dimensions begin to unfold. Kindness is being generous with others, giving your time, money, and talent to support those who are in need. Kindness is being compassionate, which means to really be there for someone, listening intently to their suffering or just sitting with them and silently supporting them. Such compassion involves a deep concern for the welfare of others. Kindness is also being nurturing and caring to others — to enjoy doing favours for them, to take care of them, and to perform good deeds.(4)



Kind individuals believe that others are worthy of attention and affirmation for their own sake as human beings, not out of a sense of duty or principle.

Activities such as smiling, hold the door open, giving an honest compliment, thanking someone who you appreciate and being a good listener make people feel worthwhile. Words used to describe this feeling include friendly, positive, happier, appreciated, wanted, part of the team.

How we treat each other at work has an enormous impact on how teams perform – with potentially fatal consequences if you work in healthcare. This quote from Chris Turner sums up how our behaviour has a correlation to patient experience:

“ by choosing to behave in ways that value and respect the people around us, we help individuals and teams to perform at their peak. In my world, civility can literally save lives, but for all of us who work in teams, who work with people, civility can be the difference between OK and great, no matter what we do.”

I hope you will have a look at these resources and take time to reflect on your behaviour both in and out of work. The link below to “viacharacter” can give you further insight into your own strengths and how others see you.

If you need to speak to anyone in confidence, please feel free to contact me - [Sheila.doughty@nhs.net](mailto:Sheila.doughty@nhs.net) or Alison Hawes, FTSU guardian- [sc-tr.raisingconcerns@nhs.net](mailto:sc-tr.raisingconcerns@nhs.net)

References:

- 1) [https://www.ted.com/talks/chris\\_turner\\_when\\_rudeness\\_in\\_teams\\_turns\\_deadly?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/chris_turner_when_rudeness_in_teams_turns_deadly?language=en)
- 2) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1EDatTYMkE>
- 3) <https://www.rcog.org.uk/globalassets/documents/members/membership-news/og-magazine/winter-2018/civility-saves-lives-og-magazine-winter-2018.pdf>
- 4) <https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths-via>