

NL Journal of Medical and Pharmaceutical Sciences

Volume 1 Issue 2 October 2025

Review Article

Changing the Narrative in Nursing: From Nurses Eat Their Young to Nurses Grow Their Young

Tamara Washington-Brown

***Corresponding Author:** Tamara Washington-Brown, Nursing Success for Life (NS4L), 2100 Haddonfield Road, Pennsauken, NJ 08110, USA.

Received Date: August 25- 2025

Publication Date: September 26- 2025

Abstract: For decades, the phrase “nurses eat their young” has described a culture of incivility, bullying, and inadequate support for novice nurses. This narrative contributes to burnout, turnover, and diminished professional morale, with downstream effects on patient safety and workforce stability. This editorial calls for a deliberate shift toward “nurses grow their young,” highlighting evidence-informed strategies such as structured mentorship, compassionate preceptorship, professional development pathways, and organizational accountability. By aligning workplace culture with nursing’s core values of care and advocacy, the profession can strengthen retention, resilience, and outcomes for both clinicians and patients.

Keywords: Nursing culture, Incivility, Bullying, Mentorship, Preceptorship, Retention.

Introduction

Nursing is grounded in compassion, advocacy, and service. Yet many new nurses enter workplaces where exclusion and lateral violence overshadow these values. The colloquialism “nurses eat their young” captures a destructive pattern that undermines well-being and patient care [4]. Workplace incivility is a key driver of early turnover among new graduates [3]. To safeguard the profession’s future, nursing must intentionally cultivate environments where nurses grow their young.

The Consequences of “Eating Our Young”

Incivility and bullying correlate with lower job satisfaction, impaired teamwork, and higher turnover [2,3]. Financially, replacing nurses particularly within the first year creates substantial organizational costs and destabilizes unit culture and continuity of care. Beyond economics, persistent hostility erodes psychological safety, discouraging the speaking-up behaviors that are essential to patient safety.

Growing Our Young: Evidence-Informed Strategies

Structured mentorship. Formal mentoring programs improve clinical confidence, professional identity, and retention for early-career nurses [1]. Successful models clearly define expectations, provide training for mentors, and include feedback cycles.

Compassionate preceptorship. Effective preceptors blend clinical oversight with empathy and strengths-based coaching. Training preceptors in feedback delivery and emotional intelligence fosters belonging and accelerates competence.

Professional development pathways. Access to certification, leadership training, and clear career ladders signal that organizations value growth, reducing attrition during the critical transition-to-practice period.

Cultural accountability. Leaders must operationalize zero-tolerance policies for bullying, model civility, and measure organizational climate (e.g., civility surveys, retention metrics). Recognizing mentorship and teamwork in evaluations embeds desired cultural norms.

Initiatives such as Nursing Success for Life (NS4L) apply these principles by integrating mentorship, CPR education, and leadership development to help nursing students and practicing nurses thrive in supportive communities.

Call to Action

Retiring the narrative of “nurses eat their young” is both a moral imperative and a workforce strategy. By embracing “nurses grow their young,” the profession aligns its culture with its highest ideals while strengthening systems of care. Leaders, educators, and frontline clinicians must act now: invest in mentorship, prepare preceptors, build development pathways, and hold one another accountable for civility.

Conclusion

Nursing’s future depends on how it treats its newest members. Choosing growth over gatekeeping will enhance retention, resilience, and patient outcomes. When nurses grow their young, everyone benefits clinicians, organizations, and the communities we serve.

Like a plant, nursing requires the right environment to flourish sunlight, oxygen, water, and nurturing care. Without these, growth is stifled, and vitality is lost. Our profession must commit to cultivating sustainability not only for the patients we serve but also for ourselves and each other as colleagues. By replacing incivility and bullying with mutual support and encouragement, we can build a strong, united community of nurses ready to lead the world into a healthier future.

References

1. Chen, Y.-C., & Lou, M.-F. (2014). The effectiveness and application of mentorship programmes for newly registered nurses: A systematic review. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 22(4), 433–442. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jonm.12102>.
2. Hutchinson, M., Vickers, M. H., Jackson, D., & Wilkes, L. (2006). Workplace bullying in nursing: Towards a more critical organisational perspective. *Nursing Inquiry*, 13(2), 118–126. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1440-1800.2006.00314.x>.
3. Laschinger, H. K. S., Wong, C. A., & Grau, A. L. (2012). The influence of authentic leadership on newly graduated nurses’ experiences of workplace bullying, burnout and retention outcomes. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 20(5), 648–658. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2834.2012.01375.x>.
4. Simons, S. R., & Mawn, B. (2010). Bullying in the workplace—A qualitative study of newly licensed registered nurses. *AAOHN Journal*, 58(7), 305–311. <https://doi.org/10.3928/08910162-20100616>.