



Solution

Banned Words & Phrases

What...

The effort to eliminate and/or replace certain unhelpful phrases or words. While each person, department, or organization may select the words or phrases to be eliminate or replaced, some common ones that are often problematic are: "that's not my job," "I don't know," or "that's not my patient."

In some organizations, these efforts are referred to as "say this, not that" or "words to choose and words to lose"

Why...

The words we choose matter. At our best, our words are helpful, caring, and kind. Yet in fast-paced workplaces, filled with well-intended and caring people, it's not uncommon to hear certain words and phrases said to patients, visitors, co-workers, or physicians – or in earshot of them – that are unhelpful, offensive, or could be misinterpreted.

Certain words and phrases can unnecessarily spark negative feelings or responses. The aim of banning certain words and phrases is to support an environment in which everyone feels safe, well served, and cared for.

When we become more aware of our words, and the impact of them, we are making progress to improve relationships, teamwork, safety, and satisfaction -- one conversation at a time.

How...

The aim is to eliminate – or replace – specific words or phrases that are likely to be perceived as unhelpful or offensive, could be misinterpreted or cause confusion, or unnecessarily sparks negative feelings or responses.



This effort involves determining which words or phrases are harmful or not appropriate to be said to certain people in certain situations and striving to eliminate them and replace them. This effort is often spearheaded by an employee-driven improvement team (e.g., patient experience team). Create approaches include having an employee nomination contest in which ideas for banned words and phrases are submitted at various intervals (annually, semi-annually, or quarterly). See the example on the following page.

When promoting the elimination or replacement of the banned words and phrases, be sure to “connect the dots” as to why those specific words or phrases are likely to be perceived as unhelpful or offensive, are harmful, could be misinterpreted or cause confusion, or unnecessarily sparks negative feelings or responses (such as in the EXAMPLE below).

Banning certain words or phrases is often an entire organization effort; however, specific individuals or departments may have their unique words or phrases that should be targeted for elimination or replacement.

EXAMPLE – Banned Phrase “We are short staffed today.”

Phrases such as “we’re short staffed today” may seem innocent and might even be true ... but when stated to certain people in certain situations ... can lead to negative perceptions or poor outcomes.

For example, when an unsteady and weak patient hears “we are short staffed today,” he or she might respond by not calling for help. They likely won’t want to bother the busy staff. The result of this could be a fall and injury.

Staff members are likely well intended when they chose those words to apologize for delays or inconveniences to patients ... “I’m sorry it took longer than I wanted. We’re short staffed today” ... but in hindsight, staff feel awful when they connect-the-dots as to how their words impacted the patient.

Banning the phrase “we’re short staffed today” with patients or family members doesn’t mean that a staff member can’t use these words in private conversations with a supervisor or others who may need to know to resolve the staffing situation.





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THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK



NEW WORDS TO CHOOSE: WORDS TO LOSE

-Brought to you by the Patient Experience Team

You told us, it's time to lose:

"I will in a minute," and/or "I'm too busy."

- This phrase decreases quality of care and patient satisfaction.



Instead, when speaking to patients/families:

- ***"Let me help you right away. We always want to respond promptly to the concerns of our patients and families."***

You told us, it's time to lose:
"I don't know," or "I have no idea."

- This phrase points to employee incompetence and/or disinterest and produces a lack of trust.



Instead, rephrase your comment with:

- ***"Let me find an answer for you right away."***
- This response reflects attentiveness to our patients' needs and confidence in our skills.

Credit: Sullivan County Community Hospital

