

Context / Rationale

Healthcare delivery is challenging for both patients and families, but also for staff and providers. Over 75% of Canadian nurses reported experiencing burnout and 69% planning to leave their positions within five years (RNAO, 2022). As such, HRH recognized the need for a supportive work environment. Psychological safety, which fosters open communication, error reporting, and team collaboration, was identified as a key factor in mitigating burnout and improving outcomes (Edmondson et al., 2016; O'Donovan & McAuliffe, 2020).

Objective / Key Challenge

The primary objective of this initiative is to enhance psychological safety at Humber River Health (HRH) to support learning from errors, foster a culture of open communication, and prioritize process improvement over blame.

By facilitating psychological safety, HRH aims to empower staff to voice concerns, collaborate effectively, and implement solutions that improve nurse retention, reduce burnout, and enhance patient safety.

Progress to Date / Results-Key Milestones and Activities

Humber River Health has achieved significant progress in fostering psychological safety through key actions, including:

- **Critical Incident Reviews:** Conducted system reviews focusing on process improvements rather than individual blame, fostering trust, learning, and collaboration.
- **Team Collaboration:** Actively engaged all team members in reviews including staff and providers at the point-of-care, strengthening trust, cohesion, and shared accountability for outcomes.
- **Leadership Engagement:** Trained and involved leaders to model inclusiveness and openness, encouraging staff to share insights and voice concerns.
- **Non-Punitive Reporting:** Established structured error reporting systems to ensure staff feel safe reporting concerns, enhancing transparency and proportionate accountability.
- **Application of Just Culture:** HR / disciplinary conversations, though required, are kept separate from process improvement discussions

Impacts / Insights

Leadership's Role is Crucial: At Humber River Health (HRH), leadership behaviours, such as inclusiveness and openness, have been fundamental in fostering psychological safety. Senior leaders actively participate in system reviews alongside frontline staff, creating a culture of trust and transparency. This collaborative approach encourages open communication and ensures that staff at all levels feel empowered to voice concerns and solutions (Edmondson et al., 2016).

Focus on Learning Over Blame: HRH's system reviews prioritize learning from incidents rather than blatantly assigning blame. By fostering a psychologically safe environment, staff can openly discuss incidents and identify root causes without fear of retribution. This approach strengthens organizational learning and helps implement meaningful process improvements.

Importance of Structured Processes: HRH's emphasis on non-punitive error reporting and process-focused reviews has been vital in maintaining transparency and building a blame-free environment. These structured approaches ensure that staff feel safe reporting errors and discussing solutions openly (O'Donovan & McAuliffe, 2020).

Collaboration Drives Success: HRH has demonstrated that involving all team members in the review process, regardless of their role, strengthens team cohesion and trust. This inclusive approach fosters a sense of shared responsibility and collective learning, contributing to better outcomes and enhanced psychological safety.