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## LIONS DON'T EAT GRASS...ADDRESSING COMMUNICATION IN CRITICAL CARE TO ENHANCE TEAMWORK

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**Background:** Nurses appear to be disengaged from their work and workplace cultures. A three-year emancipatory practice development research project was done in 11 critical care units in Gauteng, a province in South Africa supported the statement. Existing workplace cultures in five public and six private critical care units were observed for a total of 230 hours. Communication was identified as one of the key challenges that affected teamwork negatively.

**Aim:** To share how communication challenges were collaboratively addressed to improve teamwork in one public critical care unit.

**Methods:** Using a qualitative approach, all nurses working in one critical care unit in a public hospital were purposively sampled. Five caring conversations were held (including six to nine participants per session) in the unit over a period of two months. Collaborative data analysis and consensus were used to identify communication challenges and co-construct a way forward to improve teamwork.

**Results:** Consensus was reached that through verbal and non-verbal communication nurses displayed 'unacceptable behaviour' which negatively affected teamwork in the critical care unit. The 'unacceptable behaviour' characteristics were outlined and then linked to the animals e.g. the crocodile. Photos of the animal were displayed in the tearoom to raise awareness of unacceptable behaviour that will not be tolerated in the unit. The actions improved the overall behaviour as well as teamwork in the unit.

**Conclusion:** Nurses should be able to be open and speak about challenges relating to workplace culture experienced in practice. Setting ground rules such as being non-judgemental provides a psychological safe space to talk freely about feelings and co-construct action plans to move towards positive workplace cultures. The nurses voiced that we should remember that 'Lions do not eat grass'.

### Biography

Prof T Heyns is a senior lecturer at University of Pretoria for past 19 years involved in the education and training of pre-graduate and post-graduate students. Her area of clinical expertise is Emergency Nursing Care. She has supervised post-graduate scholars to completion a total of 41 Masters and 3 PhD students.. Currently she is supervising 11 Masters and 10 PhD students. She is an external examiner at several national and international universities, has examined 25 Masters dissertations and 9 PhD thesis. She has presented at various National and International Conferences relating Trauma and Emergency care as well as Practice development in the Critical Care environment. She has 20 published article in National and International Journals and is a lead researcher in an International Practice development research project with NRF Funding. She is a Fellow of the Academia of Nursing in South Africa (FANSA), as well as the past president of the Emergency Nursing Society of South Africa.

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