

My Vision for Emergency Medicine in Ireland

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'A Civil ED'

'Politeness and civility are the best capital ever invested in business' PT Barnum

'You're too nice to work in emergency medicine'. It was my first week working in a major urban emergency department. I referred a patient. I had done my utmost to ensure that this was a safe and reasonable referral. I had simply asked at the end of the referral conversation if there was anything else they needed to know or if I had forgotten anything. I was met with this response. Fast forward two months, it's the middle of the night, an elderly patient with extensive comorbidities is transferred from his nursing home actively dying, a 'do not resuscitate' order clearly attached to his many pages outlining care plans and medications list. His family is in attendance and does not want transfer back to the nursing home for fear he dies en route. I refer the patient to the medical team for ongoing palliation once discussion with a senior confirms that there is nothing further for us to do. In the meantime I do my best for this patient to ensure that he is comfortable and that his dignity is respected. 'You're too nice for emergency medicine' was the response as I referred this patient.

Incivility in the ED doesn't need introduction. 'This is the way it's always been', they say. 'You'll just have to toughen up if you're going to survive', says another. My vision for emergency medicine in Ireland is one where civility rules every exchange. Where we can engage in professional interactions without the fear of rude, belittling or undermining behaviour. My vision is simple- A Civil ED. A tall order? Perhaps. Worthwhile? I firmly believe so. Throughout the course of this essay justification of civility in EM as a topic for consideration will be offered. We will then discuss the impact of incivility in the workplace. Finally, a conclusion will be offered regarding why a civil and positive work environment specifically within emergency medicine in Ireland is a worthy goal.

At a time where EDs in Ireland, capacity wise, are bursting at the seams on a daily basis, to continue providing high quality care often feels like a mammoth task. It is essential, therefore, that those who continue to work within EDs are doing so safely and effectively. Why tackle incivility considering these significant infrastructural deficits within EM in Ireland? For good use of skill, knowledge-base and talent to be utilised within these departments, it is of particular importance to note that civility inspires people to work 71% harder.¹ Chris Turner of the 'Civility Saves Lives' campaign in the UK has suggested that doctors should do what we do when anything new or unfamiliar comes along- to look at the evidence. The evidence is unequivocal. When someone is rude 80% lose work time worrying about the incident.² Further to this, 48% decrease their work effort, 63% lose work time avoiding the offender and 38% intentionally decrease the quality of their work.³ Perhaps more surprising is the impact on the bystander and the service users, or in our case, our patients. Witnesses to incivility also suffer. Within a team there is a 50% decrease in the observer's willingness to help others and a 20% decrease in performance. For EM as a team based speciality, this is especially significant. Further to this, service users show 75% less enthusiasm for the organisation, or department involved.⁴ The evidence outlined here is startling, incivility has an enormous cost and yet we have all been witness to or experienced incivility.

How then, do we decrease incivility in the ED? Specifically focusing on the NCHD experience; through the use of human factors workshops in EM training we discuss the presence of incivility both within departments and between various disciplines. The referral pathway is consistently identified as one of the most contentious areas within the everyday workings of an Irish ED for NCHDs. Whilst recognition of the presence of incivility is an encouraging start, my vision for EM in Ireland is one whereby we take a significant leap further. I believe we should identify, address, plan and train for a consistently more civil working environment. We must firstly take responsibility and ownership if we are to achieve a more civil work environment within the ED. We should not have an environment whereby our trainees can be accused of being 'too nice'. A civil work environment reduces errors, stress and fosters excellence.⁵ Further we cannot tolerate an environment whereby our civil interactions are met with incivility. Awareness of the evidence of the impact of incivility is, I believe, an acceptable starting point toward my vision of EM in Ireland.

Secondly, by teaching civility from the beginning, I believe that EM could be leaders of significant organisational change. Make Every Contact Count (MECC) is an NHS initiative recently adopted by the HSE. It is an approach to behaviour change utilising day to day interactions to encourage changes in behaviour to have a positive effect on the health and wellbeing of individuals, communities and populations.⁶ It is my belief that we can apply this in turn to our behaviour within EM. We, as a speciality, act as a nexus of contact with all specialities throughout the hospital. This provides a unique opportunity to create high impact organisational change. Let us make every contact count. Politely and appropriately calling out incivility, in turn leading to a work environment whereby incivility is not an expected and undisputed norm. Imagining a future whereby within every Irish ED the norm is always civil interaction is my vision for EM.

Having worked extensively with a number of large organisations including acting as international president of the European Youth Parliament, an organisation of over 30,000 young Europeans, I recognise that organisational change is not instantaneous. However, with 'burnout' at an all time high and retention continuing to pose significant challenges, it is postulated here that this cost effective measure is a worthy organisational change that will have untold impact on the future of EM in Ireland. We need to create an environment in which 'civility rules over cynicism and apathy'.⁷ We need to begin to take purposeful steps to create a civil ED.

¹ Porath, & Gerbasi, (2015). 'Does civility pay?' *Organizational Dynamics*, 44(4), 281-286

² Porath and Pearson (2013) 'The price of incivility' *Harvard Business Review*, January- February edition 2013. <https://hbr.org/2013/01/the-price-of-incivility> accessed on 16/06/2019..

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Riskin et al (2015) 'The Impact of Rudeness on Medical Team Performance: A Randomized Trial' *Journal of Pediatrics*. September 2015, Vol 136, Issue 3.

⁶ <https://www.makeeverycontactcount.com/> Accessed on 17/06/2019

⁷ Mockus, Antanas (2002) Antanas Mockus Mayor of Bogota 2002. Civility and Society Speech.