

A Tool for Boosting Morale or a Front for Workplace Bullying?

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What is Banter?

- Defined as “teasing or joking talk that is amusing and friendly” ⁽¹⁾
- Originating from 17th century London street slang meaning “good-humoured ridicule” ⁽²⁾, nowadays remarks that are “light-hearted” and “witty”

Background

- Morale is low amongst NHS employees resulting in high rates of stress-related absences and burnout.
- Humour relieves workplace stress, promotes camaraderie amongst colleagues, improves teamwork and offers respite during monotonous work days.
- Banter is an established form of humour in day-to-day human interaction, with 98% of participants surveyed by the Institute of Leadership and Management experiencing workplace banter. ⁽³⁾
- However, ‘banter’ as a defensive justification in bullying and harassment employment tribunals has increased, with “it was just a bit of banter” often being used to excuse bullying or harassment.
- Bullying and harassment in the workplace increases poor mental health, sickness absences, job dissatisfaction and thoughts about quitting
- **2022 NHS staff survey** ⁽⁴⁾ demonstrated that over the past 12 months

11.1%

experienced harassment
bullying or abuse from
managers

18.7%

experienced harassment
bullying or abuse from
other colleagues

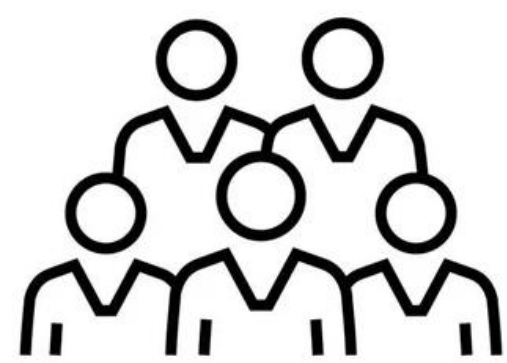
- As the NHS faces dwindling resources and a retention crisis, strategies targeting workplace bullying is of utmost importance
- Banter research within the workplace is sparse, particularly within the NHS

Discussion

- Following our workshop introducing the ‘Banter Safety Checklist’, there was an increased proportion of attendees wanting to keep banter within the NHS, perhaps demonstrating that banter can be used safely and positively.
- Our findings are in keeping with research from the Institute of Leadership and Management that found that 73% of those surveyed would not ban workplace banter, ⁽³⁾ due to fostering positive connections with colleagues.
- Looking forward, we would like to encourage the use of the ‘Banter Safety Checklist’ to be utilised and shared by all colleagues to promote safe and appropriate workplace humour.
- Importance of creating safe and enjoyable work environments is of utmost priority to be able to deliver optimum patient care.
- Mandatory training across NHS trusts should be expanded to include education regarding workplace banter.

Methods

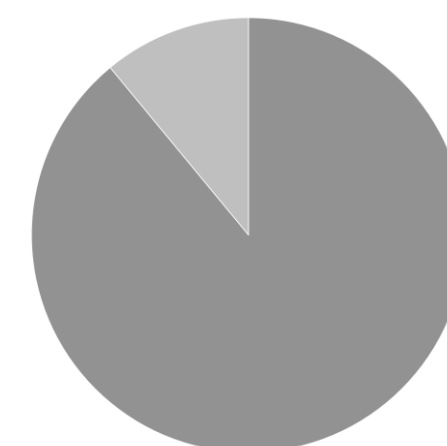
- The Women’s Clinical Network (WCN) held a free national event open to all NHS employees titled “**Stand with me, not by me. Be an ally, don’t bystand, upstand**”



45 delegates



4 out of 5 were
doctors



89% female
11% male



Consultants, trainee doctors,
nurses, management and
advanced health practitioners

- This event included a workshop on workplace banter, including its role in boosting morale and its potential negative impact.
- Education was provided regarding protected characteristics covered in the Equality Act (2010) that should not be the subject of banter
- The ‘**Banter Safety Checklist**’ was introduced to educate attendees on safe, appropriate workplace banter and fictional case studies were presented to allow practice use of the checklist to differentiate bullying from safe workplace banter
- Attendees were surveyed whether banter should be banned within the NHS before and after the workshop to assess workers’ attitudes towards banter

Banter Safety Checklist



Everyone involved understands it is banter



Everyone finds it funny

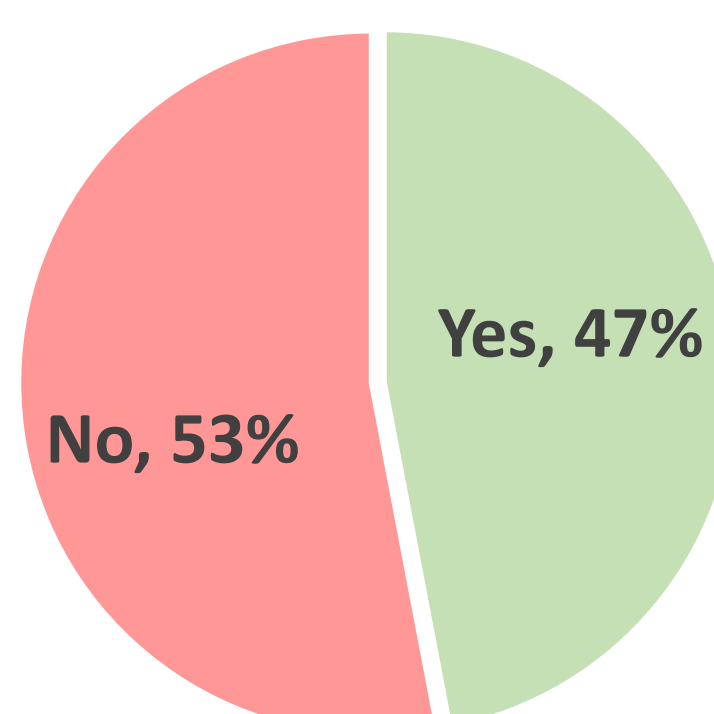


Everyone there feels included and safe

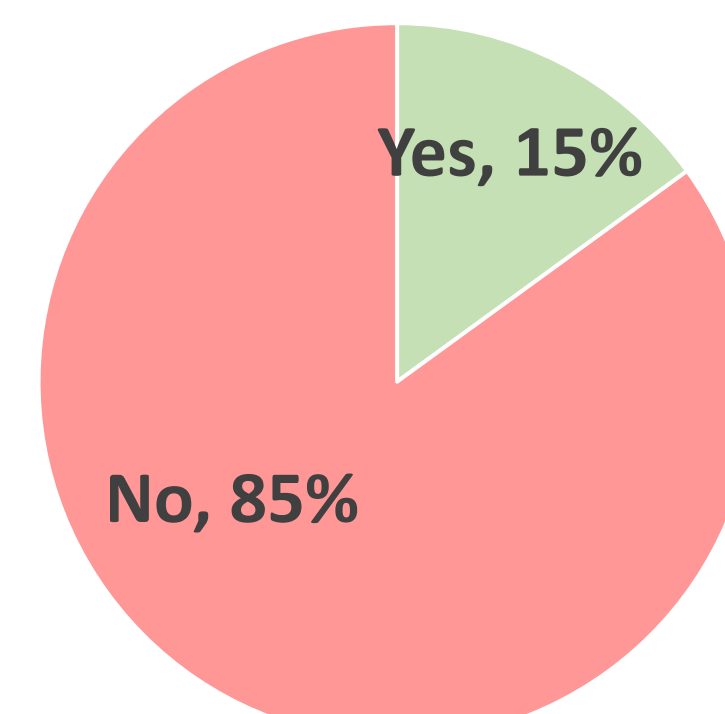
For banter to be “safe” one needs to ensure the above 3 criteria are met. i.e. when close friends or colleagues joke or tease each other and all enjoy it.

Results

Do you think banter should be removed from the NHS?



a) Pre-workshop survey results



b) Post-workshop survey results

Figure 1: Pre and post survey results (n= 15 and n=13, respectively) for attendees of the workshop.