

Know Your Acronyms

A Personal Experience

I was new to the world of health care when I took a leadership role in the nutritional services department of a 400 bed hospital. While well-versed on managing employees, corporate human resources was not something I was used to. In my previous foodservice leadership career outside of health care I basically was HR and could make decisions accordingly. I had to temper the delivery of some of my directives and messages from abrupt, and at times stern, to a more mentoring style. In the early weeks of my healthcare foodservice career, I encountered a situation that tested my ability to restrain from a Gordon Ramsay type of rant.

We had been quite busy and had been struggling with one patient in particular. “Frank” seemed to be in a room that

was a black hole. Meal trays were prepped appropriately, but somehow never made it to him. This happened not once, but twice in the same day. I visited the patient, with his family in the room, and profusely apologized and ensured them that I would remain diligent during that evening’s dinner service, and would join the tray passer as the meal was delivered. We finally had a successful delivery, but I remained perplexed about the whereabouts of the first two meal trays on that day. I still have no idea what happened.



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The next day, nursing called to indicate that a patient wanted to speak to me. I recognized the room number. With great trepidation I walked into the room of the same patient whose meals we lost the previous day only to listen to his complaints of cold food. “At least we got the tray there” I thought to myself sarcastically and then turned my thoughts angrily to the staff. The cooks and tray servers were all still on their shift so I called an impromptu meeting and, after collecting my anger and assembling some encouraging “pep talk” messages, I let the

team know that “we’re better than that” and “every tray should be prepped and delivered as if it was intended for a family member.” I kept my cool and was proud for maintaining composure.

The following day, as I opened my computer to check emails from the previous night (always scary), I was struck by an email that might as well have been delivered through the wall of my office by a Mack truck. It was from the

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IT'S IMPERATIVE

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House Administrator and it read, “John, really bad situation with 403. No food. Nurse called for tray but patient DC’d before anything was delivered. Not how we want them to leave us. F/U”!!

I literally held my head in my hands and began to get emotional. How could I have allowed this to happen? This patient had deceased without a last meal, and I was responsible! I felt that the House Administrator was a little unprofessional with her F-You, but I got it. This would certainly result in a significant investigation, public scrutiny, a social media inferno, and numerous apologies to family, hospital administration, and system leadership. I would surely be terminated.

I made no effort to control the anger that had overcome me. I stormed into the kitchen and, with breakfast orders hanging on the rail, amid the hustle and bustle of 7:30 am, delivered one of my most heartfelt speeches to date. Trembling, and exposing



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my true emotion in the moment, I read the email. Phrases like “incredibly disappointed,” “unacceptable,” and “pathetic” came easily as I imagined this patient waiting again for his meal—a meal that would never come—leaving him to depart from his family, friends, and life altogether without the dignity and comfort of a final meal! Dramatically, I walked out of the kitchen without responding to questions or comments and retreated into my office.

Minutes later there was a knock on the door. I assumed it was a member of administration who had come to walk me to the administrative offices for review. Instead, it was the patient services manager. In his hand was the printed copy of the email I was reading from during my speech. He had unrumpled it and read the email again. He began to explain, “Look, DC is short for Discharged. F/U is short for Follow Up. She wanted you to know that the patient was discharged before his meal was delivered and she would like you to follow up with him.” “Oh,” I mused. Silence, and then relief turned into laughter.

I learned so many lessons from this episode, not the least of which was taking care to understand acronyms! With a busy schedule, we can often feel rushed or overwhelmed in the workplace, but it’s imperative that we understand the lingo in a world where abbreviations are frequently used. Make sure your team understands acronyms as well, because they are often reading diet orders or trying to follow regulations that may resemble alphabet soup. Posting a frequently-used abbreviations list is a good idea. An informed staff is key to operating a more efficient, effective department. **E**

An advertisement for the ANFP Job Board. At the top, the logo reads "ANFP JOB BOARD" with the tagline "Explore. Network. Grow." below it. The main text says "Searching for a job doesn't have to be stressful." and "Visit the FREE ANFP Job Board and view available positions." Below the text is a photograph of six diverse professionals in business attire looking at their smartphones or tablets. At the bottom, an orange banner contains the URL "http://connect.ANFPonline.org/jobboard".