

**Managing Conflict Situations at the CoxHealth Trauma Center:  
Understanding and Responding to the Difficult Family**  
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ABSTRACT

This project is the development of a workshop that assists the CoxHealth emergency department and trauma center supervisors identify potential conflict situations with family members and provide appropriate interventions with the goal of enhancing patient care. The family plays an important role—positive or negative—in the patient’s recovery; therefore, the emergency and trauma center staff must create an environment in which the family feels psychologically and physically safe and are thus able to participate positively in the patient’s care. This family-centered approach is not new; rather, it is the extension of patient-centered care already established by the hospital.

The first major phase of the project develops a biblical understanding of and response to conflict. The study includes biblical examples of healthy and unhealthy responses to conflict, biblical principles of reducing potential conflict, and a biblical model of caring for chaplains and caregivers.

The second major phase reviews current literature pertaining to family conflicts within the trauma system. It addresses changes in societal norms of family definition, family-centered care, identification of difficult families, predictable conflict cycles (healthy and unhealthy), conflict management styles, short-term interventions, and the care of the family from notification to their arrival at the hospital.

The third phase is the actual workshop where the participants gain insight into definitions of and insights on conflict, as well as personal conflict management styles. The workshop provides feedback from the attendees with the use of surveys—pre-workshop, post-workshop,

and a two-week follow up. The workshop design allows the participants to receive Missouri nursing credits and trauma credits as part of the professional continuing education requirements.

The findings from the composite scores reveal that the workshop was effective and immediate application was made not only in care of the families but also to patients, staff, and departments. Each survey showed increased retention of the content. The provision of resource materials and the immediate application of the concepts to real-life situations enhanced this retention.

The staff can continually improve their care-giving skills by understanding the dynamics of crisis and conflict, and conflict management styles. Though conflict in some relationships is inevitable, the conflict does not necessarily have to escalate to hostile confrontation. A better understanding of their strengths and limitations enables the staff to address the difficult family competently.