Research shows that expressing gratitude improves physical and mental health

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If you knew that expressing gratitude to a colleague would improve their life and yours, would you do it more often?

A new study by Portland State University researchers—business professor David Cadiz, psychology professor Cynthia Mohr, and Alicia Starkey, a recent Ph.D. graduate in psychology—together with Clemson State University professor Robert Sinclair, exhibits a positive relationship between expressed workplace gratitude, physical health and mental health.

The study, "Gratitude reception and physical health: Examining the mediating role of satisfaction with patient care in a sample of acute care nurses," shows that being thanked more often at work predicted better sleep, fewer headaches and healthier eating, because it improved nurses' work satisfaction.

Improving Self-Care in a Stressful Work Environment

The study involved a group of Oregon nurses, a profession that has a particularly high rate of burnout. Cadiz discusses the findings and how applying the research can have a significant impact on quality of life and job retention by preventing stress-related illnesses and disease.

"Nurses tend to have a thankless job. It's very physical, and they're often being screamed at by patients who are at their lowest. When nurses receive gratitude, it boosts them," Cadiz explains.

"This type of study helps us understand how to keep nurses in the workforce in a healthy way. Nurses strongly align their profession with their identity and often look out for patients more than themselves. The gratitude matches up with their identity, gives them satisfaction in a job

well done and ultimately increases self-care."

Many people inherently connect their identity to their job and feelings of appreciation within their roles. Employers who understand and react to this can create positive social and economic change.

Gratitude is Good Business

From an organizational, policy and leadership perspective, Cadiz says that employers should create formal or informal opportunities for people to express gratitude. Including gratitude in a business plan is an essential step that many business leaders miss, and that omission can have financial consequences.

"Employees that receive positive feedback are healthier, and that can impact the bottom line," adds Cadiz. "Preventing headaches and other stress-related symptoms means fewer sick days, and, in this case, cuts down the cost of replacement nurses and overtime pay."

These small changes can have a dramatic fiscal impact over time, which can result in more staff, better pay rates and increased benefits.

The big takeaway—express gratitude when you see someone doing a good job. A positive feedback loop impacts you and those around you, and can ultimately shape a healthier and happier community.

"Gratitude reception and physical health: Examining the mediating role of satisfaction with patient care in a sample of acute care nurses" has been accepted for publication in the *Journal of Positive Psychology*.

More information: Alicia R. Starkey et al. Gratitude reception and physical health: Examining the mediating role of satisfaction with patient care in a sample of acute care nurses, *The Journal of Positive Psychology*

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