Peer Support: Key to sustaining our wellbeing

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Thank You

TEACH
Carilion Clinic | Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine
All of You
For many years, our system has treated us as an inexhaustible resource – ignoring our physical/mental/emotional health

We have internalized this
Think of a particularly stressful event or circumstance in your professional life. What were some of the emotions you remember feeling?
• Adverse events
• Communication with patients after AE (disclosure/apology)
• Emotionally stressful patient outcomes
• Lawsuit
• Chronic stress
• Being bullied
• Patient complaints
• NPDB report
• Patient aggression: physical, verbal, social media
Reflection on Emotional Impact of Errors

What are some of the emotions that you experienced after you realized you’d be part of making a medical error?
Emotional impact of errors on clinicians

- Sadness
- Shame
  - Self-doubt
- Fear
- Anger
- Isolation
Please raise your hand if you have never doubted yourself
Helmreich’s observations:
Similarity between medicine and aviation

“...[both stress] the need for perfection and a deep perception of personal invulnerability...”

“Healthcare Heroes”
Double-edged sword
Culture of Medicine

- High value on putting our head down, getting our work done: *do your job*
- It’s not supposed to hurt: *walk it off*
- We usually can *fix* things
Emotional impact of errors on clinicians

- Sadness
- Shame
- *Fear*
- *Anger*
- Isolation/loneliness
Fantasy

No more shame and blame

Safety Culture: Personal accountability and systems accountability
Following patient death

- Referrals dropped by 54% for female surgeons
- Only a small stagnation of referrals for male surgeons

Internal and external regulatory judgment and punishment

- Event analysis: M&M, RCA
- Department of Public Health
- Board of Registration in Medicine
- Inspectorate
- Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons
- Court of law
- Media
Communication & Resolution Programs (CRPs)

- Transparent with patients regarding adverse events
  - What happened/why
  - Was event preventable
  - How recurrences will be prevented
- Proactive and prompt offer of financial and non-financial resolution if unreasonable care
Emotional impact of errors on clinicians

- Sadness
- Shame
- Fear
- Anger
- Isolation/loneliness
Normal reactions to abnormal events

Many times reactions are transient
But sometimes recovery is thwarted...

... causing harm to clinicians and our patients
Error impact

3,171 MDs surveyed in US and Canada

Impact of Errors on Physicians’ Life Domains by Level of Error Severity*

Figure 1. Physicians’ lives were more likely to be affected as error severity increased. *Chi-square tests; p < .001 level.

U.S. vs. UK: MDs and RNs

Following medical error

~30%

Experienced some negative impact on

Work performance or personal life

Colleague relationships

TABLE 5. Factors Independently Associated With Perceived Medical Errors on Multivariate Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic and Associated Factors</th>
<th>Odds Ratio*</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive depression screen</td>
<td>2.217</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnout</td>
<td>2.016</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
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Burnout and depression = independent predictors of reporting a recent major medical error

Errors → Burnout
Suicidal ideation in MD’s correlates with recent errors

Of MDs reporting recent errors had SI (n=691) 
12.7%

VS.

Of MDs who did not report recent errors had SI (n=5895) 
5.8%

So, how do we facilitate coping and resilience?

Sources of support

- Physician Colleagues: 88
- Mental Health Professionals: 48
- EAP: 29

Factors associated with resilience after adverse events

Talking about it with colleagues
Disclosure and apology
Forgiveness
Learning from the error/understanding how to prevent recurrences
Dealing with imperfection
Sharing that learning with colleagues and trainees

Support Spectrum

INFORMAL PEER SUPPORT

FORMAL PEER SUPPORT

FURTHER PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES
Peer Support Principles

- Presence
- Psychological safety
- Empathic listening: validate
- Non-judgmental curiosity
- Reflective prompts
- Problem solving guidance
- Explore coping mechanisms
- Reframing
- Resource connection
- Appreciation
“If you build it, they won’t come”

Shapiro J, McDonald T. Supporting clinicians during Covid-19 and beyond — learning from past failures and envisioning new strategies
NEJM/ Oct 2020
Barriers to seeking support

- Lack of time (89%)
- Stigma (77%)
- Lack of confidentiality (79%)
- Access (67%)

Barriers to Getting Support

• We are strong, and strong means denying our own needs
• Culture of silence: isolation
• Our physical, mental and emotional needs are unimportant as they pale in comparison to our patients’, families’ communities’ and colleagues’
• Self-care and self-compassion are selfish
Peer Support ideally is *Reach Out* and *Proactive*

Unfair to put burden on individual clinicians to seek help
Don’t wait until clinicians manifest stress
Integrate into current clinical processes/culture
Vulnerability = Courage

Integrate that into every aspect of what we do
When should we offer peer support?

- Adverse events
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Peer support: A powerful culture change tool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Benefit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shame and blame</td>
<td>Promotes Just Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal invulnerability</td>
<td>Human factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation of emotional denial</td>
<td>Normalizes reactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>Community/solidarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self care is selfish</td>
<td>Gets you back to what you do well</td>
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</table>

Helps us show up with compassion for our patients, each other and ourselves
Not Victims

“we are not victims of that world, we are its co-creators.

...source of awesome responsibility...and profound hope for change.”

Zandashe L’Orelia Brown
(twitter – May 18, 2021)
I dream of never being called resilient again in my life.
I’m exhausted by strength. I want support. I want softness. I want ease. I want to be amongst kin. Not patted on the back for how well I take a hit. Or for how many. Instead of hearing “You are one of the most resilient people I know,” I want to hear “You are so loved.” “You are so cared for.” “You are genuinely covered.”