TIP OF THE MONTH

March 2016
Staff Support Services

Tip: Understand the effects medical errors may have on the treatment team and staff. In the wake of an incident, consider providing formal or informal support to allow for "post-traumatic growth".

Participating in RO-ILS is one way to improve your institution's safety culture. Another component of safety culture is creating a nurturing environment focused on learning and improvement. Suzanne B. Evans, MD, MPH of Yale University defines the term "second victim" and provides helpful hints and resources for supporting staff.

Confronting medical error openly is critical to organizational learning. As part of this, institutions and departments need to deal with the very human response to error. Medical errors are often experienced as traumatic, and those involved in error are more prone to burnout and psychological distress. The term "second victim" describes this phenomenon, and every member of the treatment team is vulnerable to it. Having a mechanism in place to support those involved in medical error can help move the institution and individual towards "post-traumatic growth" where wisdom is gleaned from the experience of error.

The available literature suggests that the support of peers can be critical to this process. The pathway which leads to wisdom following error includes: talking about it (Figure 1), disclosure and apology, forgiveness, moral context, dealing with imperfection, learning/becoming an expert, preventing recurrences/improving teamwork, and helping others/teaching about it. It is important to note that in the event of error, cognitive dissonance arises between one's self image as a competent and skilled individual contrasting against the commission of an error. Participating in incident learning and making concrete changes to prevent future recurrences is undoubtedly critical to the healing process after error and resolving this cognitive dissonance. Additionally, support from colleagues can be highly valuable so consider providing peer support training to teach these necessary skills.

Where to go for support or help with staff training?
*Medically Induced Trauma Support Services (*http://www.mitss.org*) provides a confidential support line (1.888.366.4877) for direct help. Additionally, MISS Tools (*http://www.mitsstools.org/*) are a great resource for self-care, clinical support, and training-oriented case study videos.*

Figure 1: What helped you in the wake of an error? (Adapted from Plews-Ogan M, May N, Owens J, Ardelt M, Shapiro J, Bell SK. Wisdom in Medicine: What Helps Physicians After a Medical Error? Acad Med. 2016 Feb;91(2):233-41.)

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