

Experiencing an Adverse or Catastrophic Event/ Medical Error for the Anesthesiologist/Anesthetist

Background

It is well documented in the literature that over the course of a career in anesthesia most of us will experience a catastrophic event of some sort (Farnaz, 2012). Our jobs are stressful. We have a short amount of time to develop relationships with our patients and then guide them through some of the most stressful moments and experiences in their lives. When we are involved with an adverse medical event it can have lasting effects on us personally and professionally. As you reflect on your recent experience we want you to know first and foremost-you are not alone and we are here to help. Below are lists of normal reactions you may experience, some positive coping strategies, and a list of available resources.

NORMAL REACTIONS

Physical

- Change in sleep patterns
- Change in appetite
- Shallow, rapid breathing
- Dizziness
- Headaches
- Muscle tension
- Increased heart rate
- Stomach upset

Emotional

- Shock or numbness
- Anger toward others involved
- Fear
- Guilt/Frustration
- Sadness
- Feeling unsafe or vulnerable
- Loneliness

Psychological

- Confusion
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty remembering details

Behavioral

- Withdrawal from others
- Angry outbursts
- Crying
- Irritability
- Decreased energy/ambition
- Marital/relationship conflict
- Increased use of alcohol or medications

Spiritual

- Feelings of despair, hopelessness, or meaninglessness
- Avoiding your regular spiritual/ religious practices
- Struggling with your religious/ spiritual beliefs

Workplace

- Avoiding patients & families
- Taking on extra work to avoid having time to think
- Feeling disconnected from the work or co-workers

Positive Coping Strategies

- 1) Self Care
 - Eat well
 - Drink lots of water
 - Get enough rest
 - Avoid excessive caffeine, alcohol, drug use
- 2) Be gentle with yourself. Allow yourself time to recover.
- 3) Seek out people with whom you can share your thoughts and feelings. Avoid people who have not been understanding or able to engage in compassionate listening in the past. Sometimes friends, colleagues, mentors, and loved ones can help, but at other times a trained counselors like chaplains, spiritual leaders, psychologist, psychiatrists are needed. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness; in fact taking care of yourself will support a fulfilling lifelong career in medicine.
- 4) Return to normal routines and manage your workloads the best way you can.
- 5) Remember that you are a unique individual, what triggers a stress response in you or reminds you of past incidents will be different for everyone

Available Resources

- 1) Program Director/Administration
- 2) Wellness Directors – Alison Brainard and Norah Janosy
- 3) Chief Residents/Lead Anesthetists
- 4) Colorado Physician Health Program (CPHP)
- 5) Hospital Chaplains

YOU ARE NOT ALONE. PLEASE REACH OUT.

References: 1) Farnaz A&A 2) REST 3) Band W