

# Peer Support: Mitigating the emotional stressors faced by clinicians

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# Disclosures

I work with national and international institutions in wellbeing program development, including peer support program development and training

I acknowledge my own privilege and bias



# Institutions are...

“where the human heart either gets welcomed or thwarted or broken.”

Parker Palmer. Quoted in Living the Questions,  
Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, 2005.



**Leading Organizations  
to Health**



# Why We Care About This

Effect on patients and families

Patient safety

Trust

Wellbeing



# Emotional impact of errors on clinicians

- *Sadness*
- *Shame*
  - *Self-doubt*
- Fear
- Anger
- Isolation



# Helmreich's observations: Similarity between medicine and aviation



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

Helmreich, Davies.  
Culture, Threat and Error: Lessons From Aviation.  
Can J Anesth 2004; 51:6



# Emotional impact of errors on clinicians

- Sadness
- Shame
- *Fear*
- *Anger*
- Isolation



# Fantasy

No more shame and blame

Safety Culture: Personal  
accountability *and* systems  
accountability

*Learning and growth mindset*





# 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

# Emotional impact of errors on clinicians

- Sadness
- Shame
- Fear
- Anger
- *Isolation*



# Emotional Impact of Litigation

Shame

Fear

Anger

Isolation



# Normal reactions to abnormal events



Many times reactions are transient



**But sometimes recovery is thwarted...**



**... causing harm to  
our patients and ourselves**



# Impact on Communication After Harm Events



# Burnout and Depression

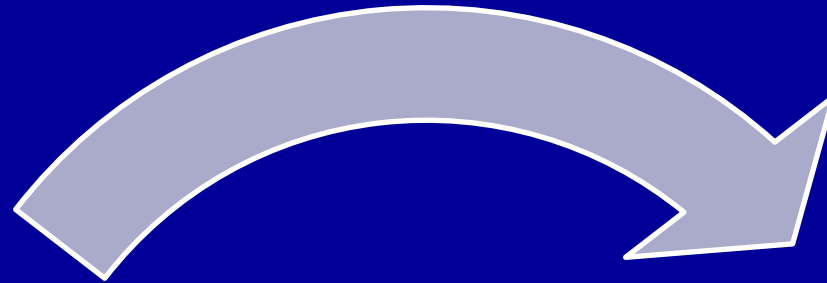
**TABLE 5.** Factors Independently Associated With Perceived Medical Errors on Multivariate Analysis

Characteristic and Associated Factors	Odds Ratio*	<i>P</i>
Positive depression screen	2.217	<0.0001
Burnout	2.016	<0.0001

Burnout and depression = independent predictors of reporting a recent major medical error

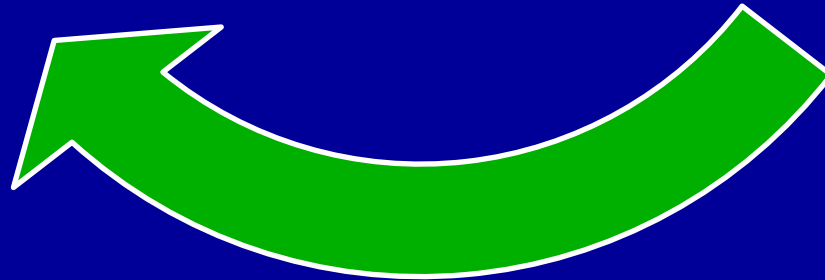
Shanafelt TD, Balch CM, et al. Ann Surg  
2010; 251(6)





**Errors**

**Burnout**





# Suicidal ideation in MD's correlates with recent errors

**12.7%**

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

VS.

**5.8%**

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



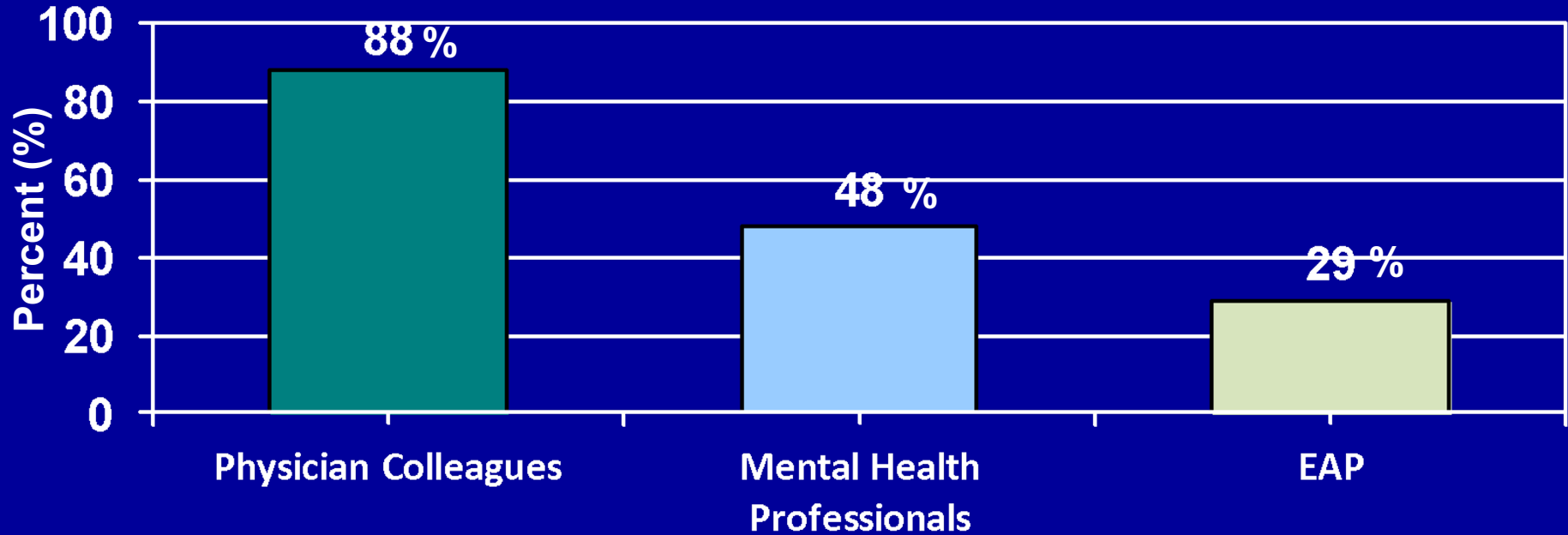
# *So, how do we facilitate coping and resilience?*



Hu Y, Fix M, Hevelone N, Lipsitz S, Greenberg C, Weissman J, Shapiro J.  
Attitudes and needs of physicians for emotional support:  
The case for peer support. *JAMA Surg* 2012



# Sources of support



Hu Y, et al. *JAMA Surg* 2012



# Factors associated with resilience after adverse events

Talking about it with colleagues

Disclosure and apology

Forgiveness

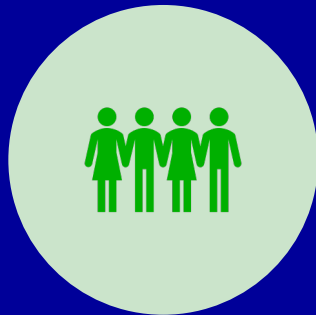
Dealing with imperfection

Learning from the error/ understanding how to prevent recurrences

Sharing that learning with colleagues and trainees



# Support Spectrum



INFORMAL PEER  
SUPPORT



*FORMAL PEER  
SUPPORT*



FURTHER  
PROFESSIONAL  
RESOURCES

# Foundations of Peer Support

Presence

Non-judgmental curiosity

Problem solving guidance

Reframing

Connection with further resources



# Operationalizing



Sometimes an entire team is affected



Proactive  
Reach out



# When should we offer peer support?

- Litigation



Physician Litigation Stress Resource Center

<https://physicianlitigationstress.org/>



# Discoverability



# When should we offer peer support?

- Adverse events
- Communication with patients after AE (disclosure/apology)
- Chronic stress (COVID)
- Emotionally stressful patient death
- End of life care
- Patient aggression: physical, verbal, social media
- Care of trauma victims
- Global crisis relief work

# Not victims

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

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

Palmer, P. Let Your Life Speak, Jossey-Bass,  
San Francisco, CA, 2001.



# 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.”

