

Arsht Research on Ethics and Community Grant

PTSD among Trauma Care Physicians: Coping strategies and the culture of silence

2013-2014

Faculty: Gabriel Ruiz, M.D.

Students: Hamilton Hicks, Elizabeth Patberg, and Hansel Tookes, III

Miller School of Medicine

Abstract

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a well-recognized entity amongst military personnel and civilians that are either exposed to or witness serious events. The development of PTSD is not necessarily directly related to the length of exposure or the quantity or quality of the events witnessed. In the health care setting, medical staff is frequently exposed to and directly involved in constant traumatic experiences that affect patients and families alike, such as suffering and/or untimely death. This continuous exposure to stressful events, especially in the trauma and surgical care setting, renders health care providers susceptible to developing PTSD themselves. Previous studies have established that PTSD is prevalent amongst nursing staff in acute settings, especially in the neonatal, emergency and intensive care. It is widely validated that PTSD in the work place has a negative impact on the provider's Quality of life and ultimately on patient care delivery. Multiple studies on acute care nursing have demonstrated that strategies that deal with coping on stressful situations mitigate PTSD effects thereby improving nurse's well-being and maximizing delivery of efficient and compassionate care. There is no data on whether the presence of PTSD and stress related disorders in physicians that provide trauma care is similar to that of their nursing counterpart, whether the lack of strategies to improve coping mechanisms are the result of differences in training, work dynamics or self-imposed attitudinal barriers and whether the presence of PTSD has a negative effect on the delivery of care. With this proposal we intend to establish the prevalence of PTSD amongst trauma care physicians, the presence and characteristics of strategies for proactive coping and the need to implement interventions to modify behavioral patterns during medical training and practice of physicians in trauma care.

Please do not copy or quote without permission. For more information, please contact the University of Miami Ethics Programs at ethics@miami.edu.