
Hospitals Create Recovery Programmes for Surgeons



The well-being of doctors may be severely affected if they experience a complication during care of a patient. A traumatic patient care event can lead to significant mental stress on the provider and this burden is known as the second victim syndrome.

When a patient experiences an intraoperative adverse event (iAE), and if this iAE was left unexamined and unresolved, a surgeon can be left feeling anxious and burnt-out, affecting their connection to their work.

Dr. Pearson, director at Center for Complex Craniofacial Disorders and surgeon at Nationwide Children's Hospital, said, "second victim syndrome can lead to surgeons feeling like we've failed our patients and we've failed ourselves".

There are potential long-term consequences for surgeons experiencing second syndrome, including increased anxiety concerning future errors, lack of job confidence, sleeplessness, increased worry and increased level of caution. Additionally, surgeons may attempt to shift responsibilities; surgeons may redirect their cases to the interventional radiologist to avoid the fear of experiencing another error.

Surgeons experiencing the second victim syndrome can suffer in a variety of ways and the problem can continue long-term if there is a lack of support system to help surgeons in their recovery. Strong institutional support system can make all the difference to surgeons, helping them to better each other and helping them manage their complex relationship with adverse events.

A medical team at Massachusetts General Hospital established a support system, where they designed a formal, surgery-specific peer support program for surgeons. The programme trains peer supporters to initiate follow-ups with the affected surgeons, supporting them through their emotions following the event.

Dr. Pearson commented, "It really can start a snowball effect, in a positive way, by building camaraderie, which encourages residents to use each other as resources, and improving teamwork. It gets residents talking to each other, about both patient-related matters and more personal ones, which has a positive spillover effect with communication".

It is essential that all surgeons have the support they need, should they experience a complication or adverse outcome. As institutions offer such support systems, hospitals may be able to prevent their surgeons from dropping out due to the guilt, shame and anxiety over unresolved events. Promoting recovery processes provides surgeons with the capability to recognise these issues in others, bettering awareness around surgeon wellness.

Source: [American College of Surgeons](#)

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