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Coping & Recovery after an Adverse Event

As a clinician, being involved in an adverse patient outcome may cause significant emotional distress. Although we may know that the outcome is not due to our professional or personal shortcomings, it is not uncommon for us to experience an array of strong feelings when we feel powerless in the face of the event.

Following an adverse event we may question our competence and commitment to the practice of medicine. We might become fearful or defensive and feel diminished personal rewards from our work. Such reactions may occur in varying degrees and are all common and natural.

Reactions may include:

- Behavioral: sleep disturbance, inability to get things done
- Emotional: anxiety, fear, anger, moodiness, feeling desperate, decreased self worth, feeling out of control
- Cognitive: indecisive, confused, inability to concentrate, obsessive rumination about the event
- Physical symptoms: fatigue, backaches, nausea

Positive coping strategies include:

- Recognize that re-playing thoughts about the event is normal and will likely decrease over time. You may find it helpful to gently bring your attention back to something like your breathing or other calming thoughts.
- Use those strategies that have worked for you in the past during times of emotional stress.
- Share your feelings with family/friends
- Try to rest more and eat well-balanced and regular meals (even when you don't feel like it)
- Exercise
- Reestablish a normal schedule as soon as possible

BWH Peer Support Program

Many clinicians find that talking to another clinician who has "been there" is incredibly helpful. We have trained peer support colleagues in multiple departments, one of whom will reach out to you if you are involved in an adverse event. Peer support is private and confidential. If you haven't heard from a peer supporter, please contact us via phone or email per the contact information above.

Additional Resources

While a traumatic incident cannot be erased from your memory, most people find that memories become less upsetting and vivid over time. If the feelings are prolonged or you are finding your normal routine difficult to manage, please let us know so we can connect you with someone to help. Also feel free to contact Risk Management (617-732-6442), Employee Assistance Program (<http://eap.partners.org>), or any of the resources listed on our website: www.brighamandwomens.org/cpps.

You are not alone, so please don't hesitate to reach out.