From Dr. Rebecca Smith-Coggins
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Stanford Committee for Professional Satisfaction and Support

PEER SUPPORT IS HERE!

Adverse clinical events can have a devastating effect on physicians. Research has shown that those involved often want to first turn to peers for support, and that peers can effectively alleviate distress resulting from these incidents. In 2014, in response to this need, our committee created a formal program with trained volunteer physicians to act as peer supporters for other physicians on the medical staff. Recently, we developed a similar program for house staff with residents trained to be peer supporters. These conversations are confidential and legally protected.

We are pleased to announce an expansion of our program to include not only critical incidents, but also any other difficult clinical experiences including support for those involved in litigation. The process for both medical staff and house staff can be activated with our email peersupport@stanfordhealthcare.org or a call to 650-736-8871 during working hours. Supervisors are encouraged to call routinely after specific incidents to refer faculty or trainees, and individuals can request a peer supporter for themselves or others.

A designated peer supporter, who will be given no details of the situation, will contact the involved physician by phone or email with the subject line “Touching Base” to offer an informal, friendly ear. If desired, the individual responds directly to the peer supporter. For more details see Peer Support Webpage.

This new development comes on a bittersweet note as Dr. Bryan Bohman, the founder of our committee, is stepping down as chair. Bryan’s enthusiasm, vision, and persistence facilitated a burgeoning array of programs for our physicians and trainees. Fortunately, he will remain as a committee member. We send him our deepest and most sincere thanks. As the incoming chair, I welcome your comments, questions and suggestions.

Recent Research:

Care of the clinician after an adverse event. Pratt SD, Jachna BR. Int J Obstet Anesth. 2015 Feb;24(1):54-63. PMID: 25499810

From this thorough review article, needed hallmarks of a peer support program are: “credibility of peers, immediate availability, voluntary access, confidentiality, emotional ‘first aid’ (not therapy!), and facilitated access to next level of support.” [We are 6/6!]


“No one would have considered pulling Sully or Skiles or the flight crew members out of the river and asking them to head back to La Guardia and fly another leg. Yet in medicine, physicians are generally expected to continue caring for patients, sometimes without even a brief period of time to reflect or regroup.”