

Improving patients' safety (and doctors' health) by helping French young doctors* better cope with their medical errors : an observational survey

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PRESENTATION ABSTRACT

Introduction / Aim :

Medical errors often cause profound trauma, especially among younger doctors and students. The negative impacts concern both their private life (burnout, suicide) and their professional practice ("defensive" medicine). Perceived as shameful and dangerous for themselves, these "errors" are regularly "concealed" and thus do not contribute to the improvements of patients' safety. What could be done to help students manage their inevitable errors, in order to reduce their harmful effects? Our study aimed at identifying the strengths / weaknesses of some dedicated courses (main objective) offered by the Paris 7 University (P7U), suggesting new courses of actions, while determining who would be the best interlocutors for interns to speak about their mistakes (Secondary objectives).

Method and Results :

An observational survey having anonymously interviewed through the Internet 840 interns registered at the general practitioners department of P7U. Analysis of 208 fully completed questionnaires, plus 9 face-to-face interviews.

About 85% of interns would recommend the courses offered by P7U to help better manage medical errors. In addition to exchanges of experiences between co-interns, the support of "senior" doctors seems essential, but could be improved. The use of a dedicated internet forum or telephone hotline, as well as « role plays" and a « what should I do exactly when it happens to me?» training module, would seem relevant.

Discussion and Conclusions :

Our study confirms the need to encourage interns exchange their experiences on medical errors, provided that this is done in a safe and non-judgmental environment, using a well-trained facilitator. These meetings should be held regularly (at the university or hospital), but would require more proactive support from senior doctors, including disclosing their own vulnerabilities and past errors as an example. No improvement in the physicians' well-being nor patients' safety seems possible if students are not actively encouraged to speak "positively" about their mistakes, regardless of the means used.

Learning objectives: by attending this session participants will...

- Better apprehend the extent of the negative impacts of medical errors on younger doctors.
- Discuss possible ways to help them cope positively with these often traumatic events.
- Understand the reasons for the silence of doctors surrounding their mistakes, when in fact exchange of experiences should be a priority for everyone's sake.