



Trauma-Informed Care: What we learned and where we are going...

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Overview of Presentation

- What is Trauma?
- How Does Trauma Affect People?
- Why is Understanding Trauma Important?
- What Can We Do to Provide Trauma Sensitive Care and Practices?
- Morris Heights Health Center's learned lessons



What is Trauma?

When you hear TRAUMA
what comes to mind?



What is Trauma?

- Trauma refers to intense and overwhelming experiences that involve serious loss, threat or harm to a person's physical and/or emotional well being.
- These experiences may occur at any time in a person's life. They may involve a single traumatic event or may be repeated over many years.
- These trauma experiences often overwhelm the persons coping resources. This often leads the person to find a way of coping that may work in the short run but may cause serious harm in the long run.



Examples of Traumatic Life Experiences

- Physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse in childhood or adulthood
- In Childhood
 - » neglect or abandonment (food insufficiency, lack of money to meet basic needs, homelessness)
 - » death of a parent
 - » divorce
 - » family life that includes drug addiction, alcoholism, parental incarceration, violence
- Rape
- Serious medical illness or disease (disabling conditions, loss of function, invasive and distressing procedures)



Trauma experienced in adulthood may also affect a persons emotional and physical well-being

Examples:

- » Combat related trauma
- » Refugee/torture/civil unrest
- » Witnessing or experiencing violence
- » Catastrophic loss (natural disasters)
- » Terrorism
- » Bottom line findings: These experiences raise the individuals risk for severe emotional distress, suicide, physical illness, substance abuse and a host of other life difficulties



What the research tells us- The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study?

- Center for Disease Control and Kaiser Permanente (an HMO) Collaboration
- Over a ten year study involving 17,000 people
- Looked at effects of adverse childhood experiences (trauma) over the lifespan
- Largest study ever done on this subject



Impact of Trauma Over the Lifespan

Increases the risk of neurological, biological, psychological and/or social difficulties such as:

- » Changes in brain neurobiology;
- » Social, emotional & cognitive impairment;
- » Adoption of health risk behaviors as coping mechanisms (eating disorders, smoking, substance abuse, self harm, sexual promiscuity, violence); and
- » Severe and persistent behavioral health, physical health and social problems, early death.

(Felitti et al, 1998)



Healthcare conditions often associated with a history of adverse childhood experiences:

- Diabetes
 - Liver Disease
- Gynecologic Disorders
- Sexually Transmitted Diseases
 - Unintended Pregnancies
 - Cancer
 - COPD
 - Heart Disease
- High Blood Pressure
 - Obesity

Why is Understanding Trauma Important?





Triggers in Healthcare Settings

Definition: An external event that causes internal discomfort or distress such as:

- » Sights - white lab coats, medical equipment, restraints, X-ray bib, room temperature
- » Sounds - dental drill, ambulance sirens, chaos in environment
- » Smells - rubbing alcohol, antiseptic odors, latex gloves



Why medical settings may be distressing for people with trauma experiences:

- Invasive procedures
- Removal of clothing
- Physical touch
- Personal questions that may be embarrassing/distressing
- Power dynamics of relationship
- Gender of healthcare provider
- Vulnerable physical position
- Loss of and lack of privacy

Signs that a person may be feeling distressed:



- » **Emotional reactions** – anxiety, fear, powerlessness, helplessness, worry, anger
- » **Physical or somatic reactions** – nausea, light headedness, increase in BP, headaches, stomach aches, increase in heart rate and respiration or holding breath
- » **Behavioral reactions** – crying, uncooperative, argumentative, unresponsive, restlessness
- » **Cognitive reactions** – memory impairment or forgetfulness, inability to give adequate history



Trauma may negatively influence access to and engagement in primary care:

Avoidance of medical and dental services

Non-adherence to treatment

Postponing medical and dental services until things get very bad

Misuse of medical treatment services –
ex. over use of ER Services and misuse of pain meds



Why trauma is not routinely addressed:

- Lack of time
- Lack of awareness
- Lack of tools
- Lack of training
- Misconceptions/discomfort



What can we do to provide Trauma sensitive care and practices?



What are we doing to make our organization trauma-informed?

- » Our organization joined a national trauma-informed care Learning Community initiative organized by the National Council for Community Behavioral Health.
- » We have a team that is part of a large Learning Community made up of 60 other organizations who are working and learning to improve the way we meet the needs of people with trauma experiences
- » We have organized a Core Implementation Team consisting of clinicians, administrators and patients.



A Trauma-Informed Care Organization includes:

- * Safe, calm and secure environment with supportive care
- * System wide understanding of trauma prevalence, impact and trauma informed care
- * Cultural Competence
- * Consumer voice, choice, and self-advocacy
- * Recovery, consumer-driven and trauma specific services
- * Healing, hopeful, honest and trusting relationships



What MHHC has learned: Agency

- » To provide effective services we need to understand the life situations that may be contributing to the persons current problems
- » Many current problems faced by the people we serve may be related to traumatic life experiences
- » People who have experienced traumatic life events are often *very sensitive* to situations that remind them of the people, places or things involved in their traumatic event
- » These reminders, also known as triggers, may cause a person to relive the trauma and view our setting/organization as a source of distress rather than a place of healing and wellness



What has MHHC learned: Staff

- » We might unintentionally cause harm by practices, policies and activities that are insensitive to the needs of our clients.
- » Re-victimizing or re-traumatizing someone unintentionally is a real possibility
- » All of us who work at Morris Heights Health Center are not immune from adverse experiences in the present or the past.
- » Understanding trauma also means recognizing that our personal traumatic experiences or the stress associated with working in human services may impact our emotional and physical well being as well as our work success and satisfaction

How understanding trauma and improving our services helps all of us

A trauma-informed organization

- » Increases safety for all
- » Improves the social environment in a way that improves relationships for all
- » Cares for the caregivers
- » Increases the quality of services
- » Reduces negative encounters and events
- » Creates a community of hope and health
- » Increases success and satisfaction at work





What practical steps can we take?

Why is understanding Trauma important to not only your patients, but to their families and your community?



Take Aways

- A. Screen and assess for trauma
- B. Communicate a sensitivity to trauma issues
- C. Train “**all**” staff about trauma, sensitive practice and sharing critical information
- D. Create a safe and comfortable environment



Principles of Sensitive Practice

- 1. *Respect***
- 2. *Taking Time***
- 3. *Rapport***
- 4. *Sharing Information***
- 5. *Sharing Control***
- 6. *Respecting Boundaries***
- 7. *Fostering Mutual Learning***
- 8. *Understanding Non-linear Healing***
- 9. *Demonstrating Awareness and Knowledge of Trauma***

Handbook on Sensitive Practice for Health Care Practitioners: Lessons from Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse was researched and written by Candice L. Schachter, Carol A. Stalker, Eli Teram, Gerri C. Lasiuk and Alanna Danilkewich



Resources

- » Health Appraisal Questionnaire – Felitti
- » Trauma Survivors in Medical and Dental Settings – The Western Mass Training Consortium
<https://nchdv.confex.com/nchdv/2012/recordingredirect.cgi/id/347>
- » Traumatic Stress in Ill or Injured Children – National Child Traumatic Stress Network
www.nctsnet.org
- » Handbook on Sensitive Practice for Health Care Practitioners by Candice L. Schachter et al
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/pdfs/nfntsx-handbook_e.pdf
- » National Center for Trauma-Informed Care –
www.nasmhpd.org



Additional Resources:

**The National Council for Community Behavioral
Healthcare**

www.thenationalcouncil.org

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**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services
Association (SAMHSA)**

www.integration.samhsa.gov