



HEALING AFTER TRAUMA/HARM: APPLYING TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE PRINCIPLES AFTER UNEXPECTED EVENTS

Purpose

Introduce trauma-informed strategies to support patients and staff after unexpected outcomes in perinatal care, ensuring compassionate, transparent, and collaborative communication.

Case Study Summary

The case study highlighted how lack of empathy, transparency, and accountability after an adverse event worsened patient trauma and eroded trust. A trauma-informed response- centered on honest communication, shared accountability, and emotional support- could have fostered healing for both the patient and care team.

Goal

To promote healing-centered, person-centered communication practices after adverse events, and encourage policies that foster a “just culture” within perinatal care teams.

Presenter Contact

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WHY IT MATTERS

Unexpected outcomes and adverse events in perinatal care can result in deep, lasting harm for patients and families- physically, emotionally, and financially. These events also affect providers, sometimes contributing to burnout and departure from the healthcare field. Trauma-informed care supports healing, accountability, and trust rebuilding.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM SESSION 5

Patient Harm is Common- and Often Unspoken

- Patients frequently experience both physical and emotional harm from medical care breakdowns
- These harms are rarely addressed directly by providers or healthcare systems

The Impact is Long-Lasting

- Patients and families may experience persistent trauma, with mismatches between how patients and providers perceive the severity
- A buildup of small care breakdowns can erode patient trust over time

Adverse Events Also Impact Providers

- “Second victim” phenomenon: healthcare workers involved in errors often feel guilt, anxiety, and distress- leading to burnout

Trust Requires Transparency and Empathy

- Apologies must be genuine, not defensive- avoid blame or minimizing harm
- Use phrases like: “We know this was not the birth experience you planned, and we are sorry for what you went through”

TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE PRINCIPLES

Principle	In Practice
Safety	Meet emotional & physical needs immediately; prevent future harm
Trust & Transparency	Share accurate, clear information early; avoid blame
Peer Support	Involve individuals with lived experience in ongoing care practices
Collaboration	Level power dynamics; involve patients and staff in decisions
Empowerment	Validate strengths and resilience of both patients and providers
Cultural Humility	Acknowledge systemic biases and address inequities

RELEVANT RESOURCES:

1. **6 Guiding Principles to a Trauma-Informed Approach**

- Overview of trauma-informed care principles

2. **Disclosure and Discussion of Adverse Events**

3. **Impact of System Failures on Healthcare Workers**

4. **CANDOR Toolkit (Communication & Optimal Resolution)**

- National toolkit for open communication and response after adverse events in healthcare