

Adverse events: Immediate counselling for surgeons

Unfortunately all surgeons may experience adverse events occurring in patients under their care, or may be the subject of complaints or medico legal claims. These disruptive life events are a significant source of stress.

Surgeons experiencing an adverse event or litigation may experience many emotions including guilt, distress, and anger. Surgeons' thinking and behaviour can be affected to the point of erosion of self-confidence and wanting to give up medicineⁱ

One of the means of coping with stress is immediate social supportⁱⁱ. This is often difficult to put into action at short notice. The surgeon may not know where to turn.

Options where a surgeon distressed by an adverse event may turn immediately for social support include:

- o Head of unit,
- o Mentor,
- o Trusted colleague,
- o Australian Medical Association Victoria Peer Support Service,
- o Victorian Doctors' Health Program,
- o Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, relevant Specialty Society,
- o Medical Indemnity Organisation to which the surgeon belongs, or
- o Hospital Chaplain.

Council believes that every surgeon should think about this now before a serious adverse event occurs and work out in advance whom he/she would approach for support or advice.

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ⁱ Bark P, Vincent C, Olivieri L, Jones A Impact of litigation on senior clinicians: implications for risk management. *Quality in Health Care* 1997; 6: 7-13.

ⁱⁱ Charles S Medical liability litigation as a disruptive life event. *Bulletin of the American College of Surgeons* 2005; 90: 17-23.