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Summary

Second victim phenomenon – how can we prevent it

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Nurses

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The speaker presented on the second victim phenomenon, describing how healthcare professionals involved in patient safety incidents experience psychological impacts including hypervigilance, guilt, and increased burnout risk, and outlined a five-level evidence-based support framework developed by a European research network.

KEY POINTS

- The speaker stated that more than 50% of healthcare professionals will become a second victim at least once during their career, with some estimates suggesting every healthcare worker will experience this at some point.
- A Dutch study of over 4000 healthcare workers reported that more than 50% experienced hypervigilance lasting longer than one month after an incident, and almost one in four experienced it for longer than six months.
- A Belgian national study found that healthcare professionals involved in incidents have twice the risk of burnout in the following six months, along with increased problematic medication use and higher turnover intention.
- The speaker described a five-level support pyramid developed by a European research network: prevention, self-care and peer support, trained peer support, structured professional support, and structured clinical support.
- The speaker estimated that approximately 75% of second victims might be helped by level-two support (self-care and asking colleagues how they are feeling), though acknowledged this is based on modeling rather than measured outcomes.
- The speaker emphasized that second victim support is both a wellbeing and a patient safety intervention, as unsupported healthcare workers may be at increased risk of involvement in future incidents.

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