Trauma Informed Care in Primary Care Settings

Developed by the Trauma Committee at The Institute for Family Health
The Trauma Committee at IFH

- A committee of patients, interns and staff dedicated to helping IFH provide trauma informed care, across all sites and all positions
- We need nursing, medical and administrative members for our committee! Please talk to Rebecca if interested.
- Please email or call Rebecca Green with any trauma related questions or referrals: 718-293-3900 ext 1839 rgreen@institute2000.org
Training Goals

- What is Trauma?

- How Does Trauma Negatively Impact Health?

- What is Trauma Informed Care in Primary Care?

- How Can I Provide Trauma Informed Care?
What is Trauma?

- Trauma occurs when a person experiences a serious injury, threat of death and/or violation of personal integrity OR witnesses a serious injury, threat of death or actual death AND the experience evokes strong feelings of fear, helplessness or horror.

- Extreme stress that overpowers a person’s ability to cope.

**What is Trauma?**

- **Examples of Traumatic Experiences:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>War and other forms of violence</th>
<th>Cultural, intergenerational and historic trauma</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Childhood abuse or neglect</td>
<td>Medical interventions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical, emotional or sexual abuse</td>
<td>Sudden or violent loss of a loved one</td>
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<td>Accidents and natural disasters</td>
<td>School Shootings</td>
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<td>Witnessing violence</td>
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What is Trauma?

- Individuals experience events differently; an event is traumatic depending on how an individual interprets, applies meaning to, and is disrupted by that event.

- **Bottom Line:** If a person feels traumatized by an event or experience, than that event was traumatic.
What Do We Know About Trauma?

- **Trauma is common.** Between 55 and 90% of us have experienced at least one traumatic event, and on average nearly five traumatic events.

- **The impact of trauma is very broad and touches many life areas.** Trauma can impact a person across many parts of life: medical, mental health, family, job, etc.

- **The impact of trauma is often deep and life-shaping.** Trauma can be fundamentally life-altering, especially for those individuals who have faced repeated and prolonged abuse and especially when the violence is perpetrated by those who were supposed to be caretakers. Physical, sexual, and emotional violence become central realities, and people adapt around them.
What Do We Know About Trauma?

- **Trauma affects the way people approach potentially helpful relationships.** Not surprisingly, those individuals with histories of abuse are often reluctant to engage in, or quickly drop out of, many human services.

- **Trauma has often occurred in the service context itself.** Involuntary and physically coercive practices, as well as other activities that trigger trauma-related reactions, are still too common in our centers of help and care.
How Common is Trauma?

- 70% of adults in the U.S. have experienced some type of traumatic event at least once in their lives (National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare)

- Over 90% of patients who are seen in public behavioral health clinics (like IFH mental health clinics) have experienced trauma (National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare)

- Trauma can result in a wide range of responses including intense feelings of fear, loss of trust in others, decreased sense of personal safety, guilt, and shame.
The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study

- Kaiser Permanente study of 17,000 members, started in 1995-1997, looking at childhood trauma and health outcomes

- 10 question screening tool: During your first 18 years of life...
  - Did a parent or other adult in the household often swear at you, insult you, put you down or humiliate you? Or act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?
  - Did a parent or other adult in the household often push, grab, slap or throw something at you? Or ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?
  - Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs?
  - Was a household member depressed or mentally ill or did a household member attempt suicide?
  - Did a household member go to prison?
The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study

Outcomes:

- Childhood trauma was very common, even in employed white middle-class, college-educated people with great health insurance.
- There was a direct link between childhood trauma and adult onset of chronic disease, as well as depression, suicide, being violent and a victim of violence.
- More types of trauma increased the risk of health, social and emotional problems.
- People usually experience more than one type of trauma – rarely is it only sex abuse or only verbal abuse.

Source: acestoohigh.com
The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study

Mechanisms by which adverse childhood experiences influence health and well-being throughout the lifespan.
How Does Trauma Negatively Impact Health?

- Trauma has been linked to many negative health outcomes, *even after controlling for behaviors such as smoking, substance use and unprotected sex*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)</th>
<th>Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ischemic heart disease (IHD)</td>
<td>Suicide attempts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liver disease</td>
<td>Lung Disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fetal death</td>
<td>Substance Use</td>
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</table>
How Does Trauma Negatively Impact Health?

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Increase in negative coping behaviors as attempt to self-medicate

Disrupted neurodevelopment, leading to physical deregulation

Negative Health Outcomes
How Does Trauma Negatively Impact Health?

- A person with an ACE score of 7, with no evidence of risk taking behaviors, has a 30-70% increased risk of developing ischemic heart disease as an adult.

- A person with an ACE score of 4 or higher is 2-4x more likely to develop anger problems or depression than someone with a lower score, as well as 2-4x more likely to develop hypertension and diabetes.

- As the number of ACE experiences increased, so did the chances of the individual experiencing cancer, chronic lung disease, skeletal fractures and liver disease.
How Does Trauma Negatively Impact Health?

- Experiencing trauma causes neurochemical changes in the brain, that have biological (as well as psychological and behavioral) effects on a person’s health

  - Changes in the hypothalamic-pituitary adrenal (HPA) axis, a part of the brain that controls reactions to stress and regulates many body processes, including the immune system

  - Increased allostatic load – cumulative cost of experiencing lots of stress – which leads to an increased susceptibility to illness

Trauma in Primary Care Settings

- This may be a person who’s gone through something very traumatic...[who needs] some really safe technique...Because otherwise you’re going to have a certain segment of patients that are going to walk away feeling as though they’ve been abused all over again, quietly abused, just walking away and seeking another health practitioner, just going through the cycle, again and again and again, and maybe not understanding why, maybe not knowing how to say it, how to voice that, just keep going through that whole cycle over and over again. There’s a huge populace out there that just needs that extra gentle care. It’s because of that, maybe the whole populace needs to be treated the same way.”

- A male survivor of childhood sexual abuse (from the Handbook on Sensitive Practice for Health Care Practitioners)
Trauma in Primary Care Settings

- Many trauma survivors do not seek mental health services, but look for help in primary care settings, presenting with physical symptoms.

- Neither provider or patient may be aware that current physical complaints may be connected to past traumas.

- Research suggests that most patients with a trauma history do not object to being asked about their trauma history in a primary care setting BUT will not typically disclose unless asked directly in a safe, supportive manner.

Sources:
http://www.publichealth.va.gov/docs/vhi/posttraumatic.pdf
Trauma in Primary Care Settings

- Patients with a trauma history often present with/are perceived as:
  - Irritable or hostile
  - Frequently miss appointments, and more likely to present as a walk in, or in a crisis
  - Reluctant to admit/discuss health problems OR present with many needs/demanding care
  - Confusion/poor memory
  - Poor self-care
  - Pain issues (problems with pain perception, tolerance or chronic pain)
There are many ways what a person may be re-traumatized in a healthcare setting.

Examinations or procedures that may considered routine can be distressing to a patient, because they are reminiscent of the original trauma.

Many patients experience a lack of control, sense of vulnerability and powerlessness when accessing medical care, all of which can be compounded by a trauma history.
Trauma in Primary Care Settings

- It is important to understand that “problem behaviors” may actually be manifestations or symptoms of trauma, or coping skills that served them when surviving their trauma.

- What happens when someone is triggered, re-traumatized or their trauma is not accounted for?
  - Code yellows
  - Frequent missed appointments
  - Disengagement from care

- Viewing patient behavior through a trauma informed lens helps providers understand their patients, and provide the care needed to truly treat them.
What is Trauma Informed Care?

- A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for healing; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in staff, clients, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, practices, and settings.

Principles of Sensitive Practice

1. **Respect**
   - Acknowledge the inherent value of each individual. Many trauma survivors have experienced an abuse of autonomy and personal boundaries, and may be sensitive any hint of disrespect.

2. **Taking Time**
   - Finding ways to balance the reality of time pressure with the need for patients to feel genuinely heard and valued is a valuable intervention in itself.

3. **Rapport**
   - Developing a tone that is professional yet caring, and expresses empathy will help patients feel safe, and facilitate communication and cooperation between patients and providers.
Principles of Sensitive Practice

4. **Sharing Information**
   - Offering explanations and providing the rationale for questions helps reduce anxiety for trauma survivors, and can minimize the risk of a patient being triggered by unanticipated events. Similarly, it is important to receive information from the patient.

5. **Sharing Control**
   - Patients should be active participants in their own care, especially important for trauma survivors whose trauma likely involved a loss of control.

6. **Respecting Boundaries**
   - Crucial for a sense of safety, ask permission before beginning a procedure, consider developing a rapport before asking very personal questions.
Principles of Sensitive Practice

7. **Fostering Mutual Learning**
   - Some trauma survivors may need encouragement to become active participants in their own healthcare.

8. **Understanding non-linear healing**
   - Recovery from trauma is not a linear process, understand that a trauma survivor’s ability to accept certain treatment may vary visit to visit.

9. **Demonstrating awareness and knowledge of interpersonal violence**
   - Consider the ways that an organization and individual’s awareness of trauma may be communicated to patients – pamphlets, posters, etc.
How Can I Provide Trauma Informed Care?

- Ask yourself – What does trauma informed care look like for my position?
  - PSR
  - MA
  - Nurse
  - Provider
  - Social Worker
  - Office Administrators
  - Other Positions??
How Can I Provide Trauma Informed Care?

- **Be sensitive, patient, and sympathetic** - Use empathetic questioning regarding abuse and integrate the patient's history of abuse with current health care. Ask sensitive questions when the patient is fully dressed and sitting,

- **Share control** - Include the patient in the treatment choices (i.e. a less invasive procedure, having a support person, or having a female practitioner) Regard the patient as a partner in treatment

- **Ensure privacy** - Keep the patient covered as much as possible and keep doors closed. Only require the absolute minimum amount of clothing be removed. Even telling the patient it is okay for them to leave their socks on can help.

Source: Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse: A Guide for Primary Care Providers
http://www.csacliniciansguide.net/index.html
How Can I Provide Trauma Informed Care?

- **Explain before you do** - It is best for providers to be sensitive to the patient’s needs and to tell the patient exactly what to expect during each step of the exam.

- **Be mindful of possible stress reactions** - Signs such as becoming stiff, cringing, pulling away, shaking, startling, or crying should not be ignored. Address these signs in a respectful fashion. One way is to normalize the experience.

- **Respond appropriately if a patient is triggered or dissociates** - Let the patient know where they are and reassure them that they are in a safe place. Avoid touching the patient. If the patient has disclosed past abuse, let them know that treatment can sometimes trigger flashbacks or emotional responses and that this is not uncommon. If they experienced a strong emotional reaction, reassure them that it is okay to be angry, sad or afraid (or whatever they are feeling).
How Can I Provide Trauma Informed Care?

- **Potential benefits of disclosure** - Understanding how a childhood trauma might affect survivors may be crucial to accurately diagnosing and treating somatic and psychosomatic complaints.

- **When to ask about past abuse** - It is recommended that all providers ask about a history of childhood sexual abuse on intake, but especially if:
  - If the patient has numerous painful chronic health symptoms (e.g., IBS, chronic pelvic pain, headaches)
  - The patient has psychiatric symptoms like PTSD, panic attacks, depression, or dissociation
  - The patient has a hard time establishing trust and has feelings of helplessness, shame, or guilt
  - Or the patient has extreme difficulty with medical procedures
Trauma Informed Care

- **Trauma Informed Care (TIC) is an organization-wide commitment to:**
  - Understand how trauma impacts our patients’ lives
  - Re-evaluate current practices
  - Develop new practices as needed to avoid re-traumatization

- **Universal Precautions**
  - Assume that all patients may be trauma survivors, and treat accordingly

- **TIC is the responsibility of all IFH employees!**
Next Steps

- Trauma informed care trainings for all positions – CMEs for providers
- Integrate PTSD Screenings into primary care clinics
- Streamline same day referrals to social work when trauma symptoms are identified
- Work with HR include trauma language in job descriptions
- Increase visibility of trauma services through posters, brochures, etc
How Does Trauma Negatively Impact Health?


How Does Trauma Negatively Impact Health?

- Brown DW, Anda RF, Felitti VJ. *Self-reported information and pharmacy claims were comparable for lipid-lowering medication exposure.* *J Clin Epidemiol* 2007;60(5):525–529.