



QUEBEC
PHYSICIANS'
HEALTH
PROGRAM

During a Workplace Crisis, Is It Possible Not to React?

*By Dr. Anne Magnan, General Manager, Quebec Physicians' Health Program
Hélène Bélanger PhD RPsych Clinical Manager, Homewood Human Solutions*

This informational document is for doctors who are going through difficult and unusual situations related to work (suicide of a colleague, mourning in all its forms, etc.). In the provided examples, we are all affected in some way or another. This situation can give rise to a wide range of emotions whether or not we know the people involved. It is normal to feel these emotions that will come out as various reactions and degrees of intensity and at different times, depending on the individual.

What are these reactions?

- Some people will feel lethargic and have problems concentrating or making decisions.
- Others will keep themselves busy and dive into their work to avoid feeling emotions.
- Others will willingly take on an extra workload without taking into account their own limitations, fatigue or the possible excess of their current workload.
- Feelings of all kinds may arise, such as sadness, anxiety, fear, shame, guilt and anger.
- These feelings may come out in different ways, such as insomnia, intrusive thoughts, crying fits, a tendency to isolate oneself, nightmares and flashbacks.
- Physical reactions may occur, including headaches, fatigue, nausea, palpitations or difficult breathing.

All these reactions are normal and do not always appear right away. When we are aware of them, these reactions tend to disappear in a few weeks.

- Even though it is normal to want to understand the causes that led to an unfortunate incident and have more information, this reflex is far from soothing... in fact, it can increase feelings of distress.
- A crisis is over when the pain lessens and you can progressively distance yourself from the events and get back to your day-to-day activities.



Is it Possible Not to React?

Not 100%... Everyone has his own story: an event may stir up painful memories. Some people feel a minor impact while others can have reactions that those around them might not understand. Even when informed and well prepared, certain people still have intense stressful reactions in these situations.

How can you help yourself?

- Pay more attention to your reactions than to the event itself.
- Take the time to share your emotions with someone close to you. But be careful! Not everyone can understand or keep things confidential. Go to people you trust, who can support you. Check whether the person is receptive to what you are saying. When you talk with colleagues about the events, make sure that no third party can hear the conversation.
- Avoid judging your own reactions. Be kind to yourself and show the same empathy for yourself as you would for a friend undergoing similar stress.
- For a certain period of time, try to reduce your own expectations and eliminate any tasks that are not absolutely necessary. Take a break.
- Do some exercise... even gentle exercise. Find something that will help you forget: a hobby, pastime, manual activity, etc.
- If people want to discuss the situation but you do not want to, explain to them that you would rather not talk about it. If these people are troubled by the events, remind them that they have access to professional help.

If patients know about the events and have been affected, remind them that they can contact the psychosocial service at their CLSC, or, outside of business hours, call Info-Santé 8-1-1.

As a doctor, when should you ask for help?

- When you feel the need to do so
- When you are going through a similar situation to the context that triggered the events
- When you do not see the light at the end of the tunnel or a way of getting out of your predicament
- When you have or have had suicidal thoughts
- When reactions brought out by the events do not abate or if they get worse after a few weeks

Quebec Physicians' Health Program (QPHP):
514 397-0888
1-800-387-4166

This service is confidential and completely separate from the College of Physicians.



QUEBEC
 PHYSICIANS'
 HEALTH
 PROGRAM

1 René-Lévesque Blvd. East
 Suite 200
 Montréal, Québec H2X 3Z5

Tel.: 514 397-0888 / 1 800 387-4166
 Fax: 514 397-0654
 info@pamq.org

For more information on the services offered visit www.pamq.org