

Kollegiale Hilfe (KoHi)

Mental first aid provided by colleagues at Clinic Hietzing, Vienna

The term “second victim” refers to a health care worker who becomes traumatized by being involved in an adverse event during patient care. Unexpected critical events in the context of clinical routine, like medical errors, sudden death or violence, can traumatize the involved employees and cause serious mental health problems like depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or – in the worst case – even suicide. Therefore, it is essential to quickly support health care workers after critical events.

In order to do so, a mental peer support network at the Viennese hospital Clinic Hietzing is being built. Since May 2019 more than 110 employees have been trained in mental first aid and successfully supported their colleagues after critical events in more than 20 cases. “Collegial help” (Kollegiale Hilfe - KoHi) uses the benefits of mental peer support. Affected employees reported feeling less nervous and emotionally released after talking to a trained colleague. They regained control over the situation and recovered their capacity to act. Being able to talk about the stressful situation and feeling understood was reported to be particularly helpful.

The collegial helpers reported not to feel stressed at all or barely stressed right after giving support. If necessary, they are offered supervision in order to debrief stressful activities. Furthermore, regularly organized network meetings afford an opportunity to reflect their engagements and support the development of the system.

Since the COVID-19 crisis, strengthening the mental resilience of health care workers has become even more important. The collegial help offers even in this field quick and helpful basic support after critical events. Overall, it is an advisable addition to professional crisis intervention in hospitals.

The initiative “Kollegiale Hilfe (KoHi)” was awarded first place in the ONGKG members’ prize in 2021. The ONGKG is the Austrian Network of Health Promoting Hospitals and Health Care Institutions.

KOLLEGIALE



Photo: Vienna Healthcare Group / Votava

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