Cultivating Psycological Safety: Cornerstone of Resident Wellbeing

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Medical residency is a critical phase in the professional development of young physicians. It is during this period that residents acquire the necessary skills, knowledge, and confidence to become independent practitioners. The concept of psychological safety often underappreciated is crucial in fostering a supportive and nurturing environment for these young professionals. It refers to an environment where individuals feel safe to express themselves without fear of retribution, embarrassment, or judgment. It is characterized by creating a culture where residents feel free to seek guidance, admit mistakes and voice uncertainties without worrying about jeopardizing their careers.[1] It is a critical component of any healthcare team or organization to promote the free flow of ideas, innovations, and difficult conversations.[2] In the context of medical residents, psychological safety plays a pivotal role in creating an atmosphere that encourages learning, collaboration, and personal growth.

Medical residency is very stressful job dealing with life and death of human beings. That is the time to start a family as well, female residents have to go through tougher times of pregnancy, breastfeeding and have great challenge of work life balance. The residents in our country are unhappy with their work place and have low job satisfaction.[3] There are multiple reasons including long working hours, intense emotional environment, financial instability, poor career guidance and poor research facilities which lead to burnout among residents. Lack of support and mentorship, unclear expectations, inadequate feedback by mentors and lack of autonomy are other crucial factors.

Burn out during residency has gained significant attention as it impacts work performance and patient safety. It is known to compromise patient care due to poor professionalism and results in low satisfaction of patients.[4,5] Psychological safety reduces the burnout by encouraging residents to ask questions, seek feedback, and engage in open dialogue with their mentors and colleagues. When residents feel safe to admit their knowledge gaps or mistakes, they can actively participate in their learning process and address areas that require improvement. The researchers found that residents who perceived a higher level of psychological safety in their learning environment demonstrated greater confidence, improved communication, better overall performance and lesser burnout.[6,7] A systematic review examined the relationship between psychological safety and learning outcomes among healthcare professionals. The review concluded that psychological safety was positively associated with increased engagement, active learning, and knowledge acquisition.[8]

However, achieving and sustaining psychological safety requires a collective effort from hospital leadership, supervisors and the residents themselves. Here are few ways to cultivate culture of psychological safety:

·   Cultivating a **culture of respect and non-judgment,** where feedback is constructive and supportive.

·   Encouraging **open communication** and active listening among residents, attending physicians, and other members of the healthcare team.

·   Promotes **Mentorship and Guidance** for providing regular opportunities for feedback, allowing residents to express concerns, seek guidance, and learn from experienced professionals.

·   Recognizing and **Addressing power dynamics**

within the medical hierarchy to ensure that residents feel empowered to voice their opinions and contribute to decision-making.

· Offering **resources and support services** to promote resident well-being and mental health, such as counseling, peer support groups, and work-life balance initiatives.

· Residents **Engagement** are more likely to actively involve them in their educational journey, seek out new experiences, and embrace opportunities for growth and improvement.

· Arranging **workshops and training sessions** related to stress management, team work and communication.

· Making residents **part of various committees** can help them voice their concerns and help improve patient care.

Ensuring psychological safety for medical residents should be a top priority for medical education and healthcare institutions. By fostering an environment where residents feel safe, supported, and empowered, we can cultivate resilient, engaged, and empathetic physicians who will provide the highest quality of care to their patients while maintaining their own well-being.

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