

Trauma-Informed Resilience: Advancing Pharmacy Wellness

Tuesday, October 21, 2025

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Trauma-Informed Resilience: Advancing Pharmacy Wellness

Helen Sairany, MBA, PharmD, BCACP
Executive Vice President
GA Academy of Family Medicine

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Helen Sairany, BA, MBA, PharmD, BCACP

The Trauma Informed Pharmacist

Executive Vice President

GA Academy of Family Medicine

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Learning Objectives

- Explain the principles of trauma-informed care and their relevance to pharmacist and pharmacy technician wellness.
- Identify the ways in which trauma and moral injury can contribute to burnout and reduced resilience in pharmacy practice.
- Review trauma-informed strategies to support personal resilience and self-care.
- Discuss approaches to foster a culture of safety, support, and resilience within pharmacy teams and workplaces.

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Current State of the Profession



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The Dysfunction of the 21st Century

loss of community
loss of spirituality
loss of family

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Burnout: The *Dis-ease* of Civilization

- During burnout, the very first things we give up are those that nourish us the most but seem **optional**.
- The result is that we are increasingly left with only work or the stressors that often deplete our resources with nothing to replenish—exhaustion is the result.

Huffington, Arianna. *Thrive: The Third Metric to Redefining Success and Creating a Life of Well-Being, Wisdom, and Wonder*.

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Burnout is COMPLEX

- Persistent financial misalignment between institutions, providers, and patients
- **Talent, knowledge, and expertise** are increasingly reduced to **measurable metrics**
- Shift from **Fee-for-Service (FFS)** to **Value-Based Care (VBC)** was progress — but **not a perfect solution**
- **Fulfillment gap** between **clinical training** and **real-world practice**
- **Overemphasis on individualism** despite health care's **social and collaborative nature**
- Influence of **personal and childhood experiences** on professional behavior and decision-making

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Metrics Lead to Lack of Fulfillment Lack of Fulfillment Leads to Depersonalization:

- The Most Toxic Consequence of Occupational Burnout and Stress
- We lose our ability to care—for anyone or anything.
- It starts with mild irritation leading to a lack of concern and eventually outright dismissal of our patients.

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US the Wealthiest Nation by ALL Global Standards

- 60% of adults in the US have been diagnosed with a chronic disorder such as diabetes or high blood pressure.
- 40% have two or more diagnoses.
- Nearly 70% of Americans are taking at least one prescription drug, and more than half take two or more.

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Mental Health Crisis

- In the US, 50% of the population will experience a mental disorder at some point in their lives. **Yes, this means 1 out of every 2 Americans!**
- **And as dire as these statistics are, the problem seems to worsen.**
- The fact that depression remains the leading cause of disability worldwide clearly indicates the ineffectiveness of current treatment approaches and methods. ***What are we overlooking?***

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What Is Disease?

- Diseases, whether physical or mental, are normal responses to abnormal societal circumstances.
- Most chronic illnesses we see in the US are the body's way of saying "no", when the person has suppressed their "no" in order to fit in.

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The Era of Great Resignation Is the Era of Great Discontent

- The three most common reasons employees are disengaged at work
 - Not seeing opportunities for development.
 - Not feeling connected to the company's purpose.
 - Not having strong relationships at work.

Huffington, Arianna. Thrive: The Third Metric to Redefining Success and Creating a Life of Well-Being, Wisdom, and Wonder.

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A Company Is Not Family

- Parents owe kids unconditional love
- Companies only offer at-will employment.
- A leader's job is not to show daily affection. It is to give people: purpose, pay, support their success, and well-being.

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COVID-19: Era of Reflection
COVID-19: Era of Re-Alignment
COVID-19: Era of Great Resignation



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The Era of Great Resignation Is the Era of Great Discontent

- Gallup Analysis Finds:
 - 85% of Americans are unhappy with their current employment.
 - 78% of Americans are reporting work-related anxiety and panic attacks.
 - 48% of Americans are actively job searching.

Huffington, Arianna. Thrive: The Third Metric to Redefining Success and Creating a Life of Well-Being, Wisdom, and Wonder.

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What to Do?

- When considering the current state of the world, it's important to understand the root cause of the problem before jumping to quick solutions. It's worth asking, "***Is work making us sick?***"

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Trauma-Informed Workforce for Practice Growth and Sustainability

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What Is Trauma?

- We experience trauma when exposed to events that are too much, too soon, and too fast for our nervous systems to process.
- What happened to you? vs. What is wrong with you?

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What Is Trauma?

When we don't experience the good events happening to us.

Trauma is not limited to combat veterans.

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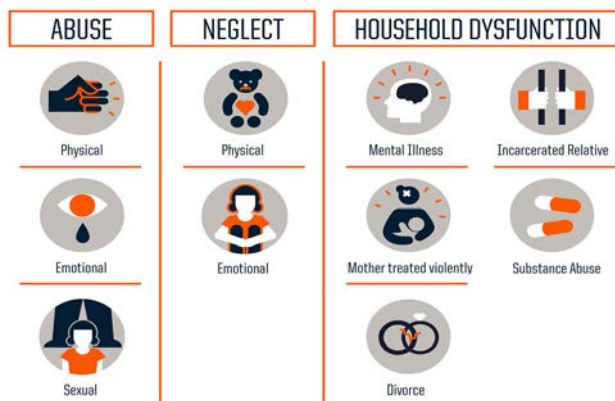
Trauma Is a Psychological Wound

When a wound does not mend on its own, one of two things will happen:

- A. Remain raw
 - A. It compels us to be vigilant—always nursing the wounds.
 - B. Leaves us limited in our capacity to move flexibly and act confidently.
- B. Raw wound covered with thick layer of scar tissue, providing protection and holding tissues together.
 - A. Drawbacks: it is tight, hard, inflexible, unable to grow, a zone of numbness.
 - B. The original healthy, alive flesh is not regenerated.

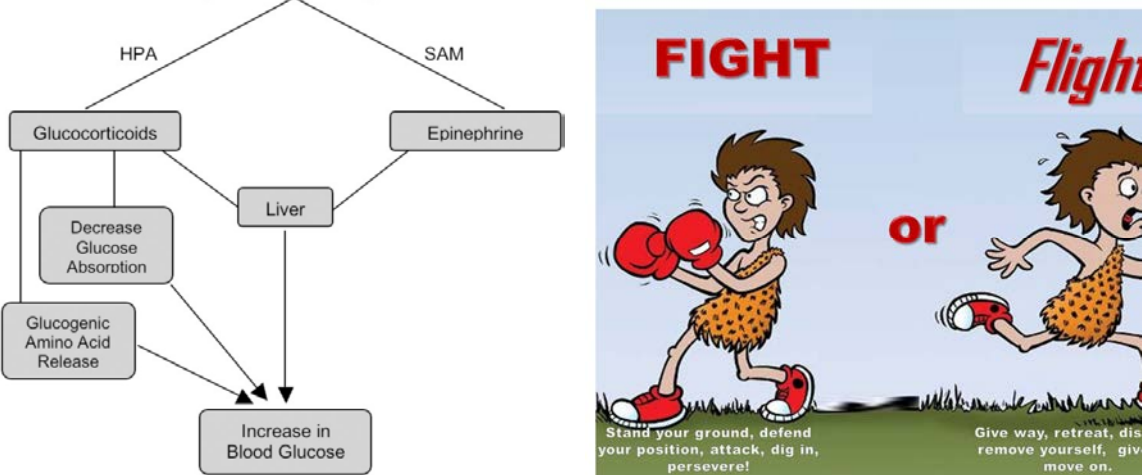
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Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE Score)



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Stress Response Explained



The diagram illustrates the physiological pathways of the stress response. The HPA axis (Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal) leads to the release of Glucocorticoids, which result in decreased glucose absorption and the release of glucogenic amino acids. The SAM axis (Sympathetic-Adrenal-Medullary) leads to the release of Epinephrine, which acts on the liver. Both pathways culminate in an increase in blood glucose levels. The accompanying cartoon depicts a cavewoman choosing between 'FIGHT' (standing ground, attacking, digging in, persevering) and 'Flight' (giving way, retreating, disengaging, removing oneself, giving up, moving on).

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When the Body Says No: The Cost of Hidden Stress

- Gabor Maté outlines the clear connection between stress and the body's physiological response to it.
- High levels of cortisol impair our rational thinking and memory storage.
- Nadine Burke Harris: children from marginalized communities who grow up in violent, chaotic, and trauma-permeated environments have impaired development of the hippocampus, which is responsible for learning and storing of memories.

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Trauma Separates Us From Our Bodies

“In the absence of relief, a young person’s natural response—their only response, really—is to repress and disconnect from the feeling-states associated with suffering.” – Gabor Maté

One no longer knows one’s body.

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Trauma Splits Us Off From Gut Feelings

We have gut feelings because they tell us what supports our survival and what distracts from our survival.

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Trauma Limits Response Flexibility

“Human freedom involves our capacity to pause between stimulus and response and, in that pause, to choose the one response toward which we wish to throw our weight.” – Psychologist Rollo May

Trauma robs us of that freedom.

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Trauma Fosters a Shame-Based View of Self

“Contained in the experience of shame, is a piercing awareness of ourselves as fundamentally deficient in some vital way as a human being.” – Psychologist Gershen Kaufman

Among the most poisonous consequences of shame is the loss of compassion for oneself.

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Trauma Distorts Our View of the World

“The World we believe in becomes the world we live in.”

“...before the mind can create the world, the world creates our minds.”

Trauma imposes a worldview tinged with pain, fear, and suspicion: a lens that both distorts and determines our view of how things are.

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Trauma May Explain the Suffering of CEOs, Leaders, & Deans

- In life-related trauma, individuals are haunted by events of the past.
- In work-related trauma, individuals are haunted by intolerable fear of the future.
- Instead of flashbacks, individuals have flash-forwards of panic, which neuroscientists have shown can affect the same parts of the brain as real-life experiences.

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Trauma May Explain the Suffering of CEOs, Leaders, & Deans

- Work-related trauma is exacerbated when leaders begin to ignore their own suffering and dehumanize themselves in order to “get through it.”
- By numbing to the damage that is happening, they stay in unhealthy work conditions and dysfunctional situations far longer than they should, layering damage on damage and risking dehumanizing those around them in turn.

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Trauma May Explain the Suffering of Frontline Heroes

- What health care workers faced early in the pandemic is a type of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) called **“moral injury.”**

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Issues

- Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians are educated and trained in a culture that values self-reliance and not equipped to discuss personal vulnerability.
- Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians are trained to care for others and receive no training on how to better care for themselves during times of occupational stress.

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Elevated Emotions vs. Limited Emotions



- In the present scenario, health care is facing many uncertainties; a lack of information, loss of control, and numerous challenges associated with payment claims, all of which can cause significant distress.
- The human brain is not built for uncertainty. It is wired for survival. In times of uncertainty and extreme distress, individuals become more self-centered and less giving, less collaborative, and less empathetic. This self-defense mechanism can negatively impact their work, their relationships, and the overall quality of their lives. But how long can we put up with this uncertainty?

<https://drjoedispenza.com/blogs/dr-joes-blog/emotions-are-not-your-enemy-part-2>

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Trauma-Informed Workforce

Given that a significant time is spent at work, it is crucial to foster a trauma-informed culture that has the following characteristics:

- Embody Belonging
- Promote Trauma Awareness
- Foster Psychological Safety
- Provide Choices
- Approach Problems With Curiosity

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Belonging



BELONGING GOES BEYOND
DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION (DEI)



BELONGING IS ABOUT WORK-LIFE
INTEGRATION

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A Workplace That Fosters Psychological Safety



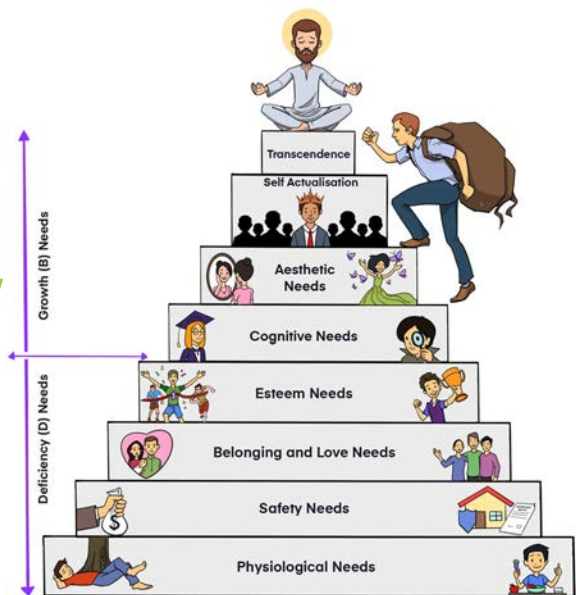
Empowers employees to share their unique perspectives, innovate, speak up, and raise concerns without fear of negative repercussions, inspiring them to be at their best every day.



Creates a nurturing environment in which people feel encouraged to share creative ideas without fear of judgment or reprisals. In this environment, sharing feedback, including negative feedback to leaders about suggested improvements or changes, is safe. It's OK to admit mistakes, to be vulnerable, and to speak truth to power.

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A Workplace That Fosters Psychological Safety



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs - Extended

communicationtheory.org

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Promote Trauma Awareness

Organizations are encouraged to consider taking an organization-wide trauma-informed assessment. This can provide an opportunity for self-reflection, and follow up discussions with leadership, and/or a trauma-informed coach.

Upon self-reflection, employees may develop a new appreciation of their own personal traumas. This self-awareness can be emotionally overwhelming to some. Therefore, providing a safe space for these individuals to debrief with a specialist is essential.

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Provide Choice

- Providing choice also prevents a one-size-fits-all approach to problem solving.
- Valuing opinions from all employees helps create an inclusive culture.
- Employees feel their voice is being heard and they are invested in the overall mission of the organization.

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Provide Choice



In *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog*, Dr Bruce Perry, an expert in child trauma, explains “...trauma at its core is an experience of utter powerlessness and loss of control.”



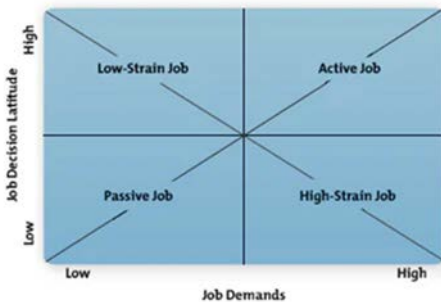
Because they feel powerless, an individual also does not feel safe within their own body and grows up believing something is off but is unable to put a finger on the cause of the insecurity, often assuming themselves are the problem.



For this reason, it is imperative for organizations to be mindful of their actions because they can be retraumatizing.

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The Demand Control Model

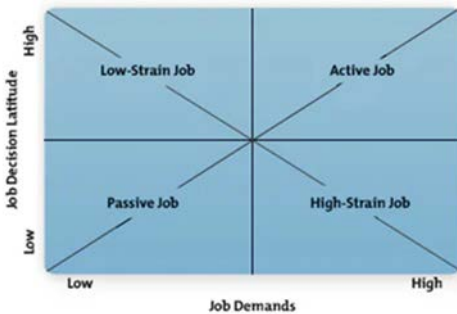


In 1970, sociologist Robert Karasek presented the Demand Control Model, which aimed to assess how psychologically safe employees feel to voice their concerns and the level of autonomy and freedom they have in determining their work demands.

This model is widely known for its effectiveness in evaluating workload and work-related stress. The Demand Control Model considers two factors: Job Demand and the level of Control/Authority given to employees.

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The Demand Control Model



Shows that those who have high work pressure and low control have an increased risk of stress.

This model can help managers intervene and find solutions to reduce employees' psychological fatigue.

If an employee has a large workload, their manager can ask them about the degree of control they have over their work.

If the employee feels they have little or no influence, then they are in a stressful job and need more active participation.

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Compassionate Curiosity

An approach discovered by Dr Gabor Maté, which teaches people to understand the root causes of someone's behavior.

This approach can be helpful for those in the corporate world, as it enables leaders to comprehend the emotional lives of their employees. By doing so, leaders can create a positive work environment that promotes healing, well-being, and a sense of belonging in the workplace.

When things don't go as expected at work, it's common to rush to judgment about others' behaviors.

In a trauma-informed workplace, it's crucial to replace that judgment with compassionate curiosity.

By doing so, trauma awareness can be put into action effectively. With compassionate curiosity, a mindset of empathetic curiosity is created, which can be helpful in interactions with others.

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Assessment Question One

- Occupational stress
 - A. Reduces risk of error as a result of hypervigilance
 - B. Increases risk of error as a result of cognitive and emotional overload
 - C. Is not associated with either increased or decreased risk of error
 - D. May be associated with both increased and decreased risk of error

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Assessment Question Two

- Psychologists define resilience as
 - A. A dynamic process encompassing positive adaption in the face of adversity
 - B. The interaction between cognition and emotion
 - C. A mindfulness practice involving deep spiritual connection
 - D. The outcome of a series of strategies designed to minimize interactions with others

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Assessment Question Three

- Those at highest risk of occupational stress and burnout include
 - A. New graduates
 - B. Male pharmacists
 - C. Those with strong religious backgrounds or convictions
 - D. Individuals from traditionally disadvantaged or marginalized groups

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How to Keep in Touch With Me

- DrHelenSairany.com
- Instagram: dr_sairany
- Facebook: Helen Sairany
- LinkedIn: Helen Sairany
- Twitter: Dr_Sairany
- Email: sairany1@gmail.com

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Our host will read the questions out loud in the order they are received.

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