Situational awareness understanding the work envi

Situational awareness: understanding the work environment and working well within it

Nowhere is teamworking more important than in managing the flow of information within health care. Poor communica - tion can lead to misinformation to patients and sta ff and delays in diagnosis, treatment and discharge as well as in failures to - follow up on test results. On the other hand, good teamwork, good communication and continuity of care reduce errors and improve patient care and sta ff satisfaction within a team. The nuances of good communication extend beyond the - ability to converse with other members of the healthcare T able team and include specific competencies, namely situational awareness and emotional intelligence. Situational awareness describes an awareness of all individuals within the en viron - ment and an appreciation of the importance of change with time. Emotional intelligence, as defined by Peter Salovey and John Mayer, is ‘the ability to monitor one’s own and other peo - ple’s emotions, to discriminate betw een di ff erent emotions and label them appropriately , and to use emotional information to guide thinking and behavior’. Experienced clinicians and clinical leaders understand that e xcellent communication skills are based on both situational awareness and emotional intel - ligence. intelligence are important in identifying stress within oneself and other members of the healthcare team. Stress, tired ness and mental fatigue in the workplace are significant occupational health and safety risks in health care. There is good evidence linking tiredness with medical errors. Fatigue can also a ff ect well-being by causing depression, anxiety and confusion, all of which negatively impact on clinicians’ per formance. Increasingly ‘burnout’ has been identified as a major cause of poor performance in the medical workforce. Burnout is characterised by a state of emotional, mental and physical exhaustion caused by prolonged stress. Burnout in the medical workforce has increased in recent years and has been attributed to lack of autonomy within the profession and increased administrative workloads; the latter is compounded by electronic record-keeping and working in an increasingly regulated environment. Doctors su ff er from burnout to a greater extent than other professions. Organisations and those in leadership positions bear responsibility for managing the working environment and work practices to minimise fatigue and stress. While this is widely reflected in legal restriction of working hours, much needs to be done to determine whether reducing resident or trainee hours of work leads to greater patient safety because of the ‘trade-o ff ’ in requiring additional ‘handovers’ between clinical teams and subsequent loss of continuity of care. Situational awareness: understanding the work environment and working well within it

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