International Innovations to Support the Workforce: 
*Addressing Moral Distress and Moral Injury in Healthcare Workers*

April 7, 2022
9:00am - 10:00am PT
10:00am - 11:00am MT
11:00am - 12:00pm CT
12:00pm - 1:00pm ET
Housekeeping

• We want to hear from you! Share your questions, comments and “ah-ha’s” via the chat box.

• A recording and slides will be available within 24 hours - We’ll email you.

• For IIMHL and CBHL Members - join our follow up dialogue on 4/14.
Welcome
Speaker

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Addressing Moral Injury in Healthcare Workers

Fardous Hosseiny, MSc, CHE
President and CEO
Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families
Acknowledgements
Ben’s Story
Recent Headlines

British Columbia

B.C. health-care workers 'at the end of their ropes' as 1 in 4 consider quitting, union says

60% of respondents say working in health care throughout the pandemic has increased burnout.

Sanctuary

Local PSWs, exhausted from long hours and low pay, say they’re burned out

Issues started well before the pandemic, but have been exacerbated by its demands.

Alberta health-care workers desperate for COVID-19 help: ‘We are treading water as furiously as we can’

Survey: 2/3 of Critical Care Nurses Consider Quitting Due to COVID-19

N.S. groups sound alarm on staffing crisis in long-term care

Staffing shortages are 'code critical,' says union president
Presentation Overview

- Moral injury in healthcare
- Approaches to addressing moral injury
- Resources to support the implementation of recommendations to address moral injury
A GUIDE TO MORAL INJURY

Download the Guide and other resources at moralinjuryguide.ca
Addressing the “Moral” in Moral Injury

Moral Foundations

- Care
- Fairness
- Loyalty
- Authority
- Sanctity
- Liberty

Source: Haidt, 2012
WHAT IS MORAL INJURY?
Defining Moral Injury

“A betrayal of what is right, by someone who holds legitimate authority, in a high stakes situation”

– Dr. Jonathan Shay (emphases added)

• First identified and studied in the Military and Veteran context
• No consensus definition, but measures to assess and treat MI are in development
Evolving Definitions of Moral Injury

“A betrayal of what’s right, by someone who holds legitimate authority, in a high stakes situation”
(Shay, 2002)

“The lasting psychological, biological, spiritual, behavioural, and social impact of perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations”
(Litz et al., 2009)
Evolving Definitions of Moral Injury

“A wound in the soul, an inner conflict based on moral evaluations of having inflicted or witnessed harm....moral injury can result not only from active behaviour...but also from passive behaviour....it can (also) involve feeling betrayed by persons in authority”

(Brock & Lettini, 2012)

A “syndrome including psychological, existential, behavioural, and interpersonal issues that emerge following perceived violations of deep moral beliefs by oneself or trusted individuals (i.e., morally injurious experiences). These experiences cause significant moral dissonance, which if unresolved, leads to the development of its core symptoms.”

(Jinkerson, 2016)
Two broad types of PMIEs

1. Those that involve people acting against their own moral beliefs, or failing to act in a way that supports them;

2. Being exposed directly or indirectly to others’ transgressions.
Moral Stressors and Outcomes

Source: Litz, B. T., & Kerig, P. K. (2019).
Moral Distress vs. Moral Injury

Moral Distress

Situational Problem

1. Moral Integrity
2. Psychological consequences

Moral Injury

Experience with long-lasting

Source: Adapted from Čartolovni et al., 2021.
Moral Injury and other problems with mental health

- Compassion fatigue
- PTSD
- Burnout
- Depression
- Anxiety
How is Moral Injury Similar to PTSD?

1. Involves an extremely stressful event that produces psychological distress
2. Re-experiencing (nightmares, intrusive memories, thoughts and images)
3. Negative thoughts about yourself, others, world
4. Negative emotions, feeling detached from others
PTSD vs. Moral Injury

PTSD
- Experiencing or witnessing actual or threatened death or serious injury
- Feeling fear, horror, helplessness
- Experiencing unwanted memories
- Psychological arousal
- Loss of safety

Moral Injury
- Experiencing or witnessing something that violates deeply held morals or values
- Feeling guilt, shame, anger
- No psychological arousal
- Erosion of trust
WHY DOES MORAL INJURY MATTER FOR HEALTHCARE WORKERS?
Assumption: the role of healthcare workers is to heal and cause no harm

In professional situations that question this assumption, healthcare workers may experience moral/ethical dissonance.
Moral Stressors and PMIEs for Healthcare Workers

- Witnessing inadequate provision of care
- Restrictions on visitation rights of patients
- Having to choose between safe working conditions and quality of patient care
- Working with colleagues who are acting unsafely
- Staff shortages leading to compromised quality of patient care
- Medication errors and preventable patient deaths
- Non-supportive work environments (e.g. lack of empathy, being treated as replaceable resource)

Source: Kok et al. 2020, Stovall et al. 2020, Rowland 2021, Riedel et al. 2022
Challenges Faced in LTC Setting

• Parallels between general healthcare-related PMIEs and LTC setting challenges

• Anecdotal PMIEs:
  o Leaving residents to die alone
  o Unable to comfort residents through hug or touch
Population at Risk for Moral Injury

• Military members
• Veterans
• Professionals in high-risk and helping occupations:
  o Police officers
  o Firefighters
  o Paramedics
  o **Healthcare workers**
  o Journalists
THE IMPACTS OF MORAL INJURY ON WELL-BEING
Core Domains of Moral Injury

- **Emotional experience** (guilt, shame, depression, etc.)
- **Identity** (disrupted or lost sense of core self in relation to others, places and things).
- **Self-regulation** (reduced ability to monitor and manage emotions, thoughts, behaviours)
- **Spiritual Connection** (loss of faith, leaving religious community)
- **Concept of self and world** (self-criticism, self-doubt, meaninglessness)
- **Relationships** (isolation, severed ties)

**Source:** Nash, 2017
The Flip Side: Positive moral emotions during COVID-19

Some people may experience posttraumatic growth, in response to moral stressors

- Psychological resilience
- Self-esteem
- Compassion
- Engagement
RACIAL INEQUITIES AND MORAL DISTRESS
Fatima’s Story
Racial Inequity During COVID-19

COVID-19 EXPOSURE

Racialized people are at a HIGHER RISK OF EXPOSURE to COVID-19 because they are MORE LIKELY to:

- Experience income inequity and poverty.
- Live in high-density neighbourhoods.
- Live in congregate housing settings.
- Experience housing inequity.
- Use public transportation.
- Work ‘essential service’ jobs with greater workplace exposure.
As a result of dealing with the stressors of systemic racism and care provision during COVID-19, racialized healthcare workers may be at INCREASED RISK OF EXPERIENCING PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MORAL DISTRESS AND INJURY.
RECOGNIZING MORAL INJURY, PROMOTING MORAL REPAIR
Recognizing Moral Injury

• Not all PMIEs result in moral injury

• Be attentive to behavioural signs/changes:
  o Isolation or withdrawal
  o Lack of purposeful behaviour
  o Anger or aggression

• Create a safe space to discuss PMIEs or moral injury
  o Acknowledge the moral stresses or difficulties inherent in the work
  o Show patience and compassion

• Promote self-care, personal meaning-making, social connection, non-judgment
Promoting Moral Repair

- Accepting reality of past moral wrongs and moral pain
- Forgiving self and others
- Meaning-making
  - Prioritizing one’s own values over strict or prescribed moral rules set by society.
    - Actively living values, including those violated, in the present
Promoting Moral Repair

• Practicing self-compassion:
  o Being open to moral pain and associated judgments as one element of human experience
  o Being aware of sense of self that is distinct from moral pain

• Identify therapeutic social relationships
  o Creating an atmosphere of acceptance
  o (Re)building strong social attachments

• Considering professional support
Framework for managing PMIEs in the workplace

• An organization-wide approach
  o Requires responses at the organization, team, and individual levels.

• Social support
  o Has been shown to be a protective factor towards PTSD and related mental health conditions.

• Peer Support
  o Effective protective factor following trauma.
What can organizations do?

• Provide strong leadership and establish cohesive teams with high morale.
• Be prepared to discuss moral and ethical challenges.
• Help team members make meaning of moral stressors.
• Model positive coping and encourage self-care and help-seeking as required.
• Celebrate successes – however small they may be.
• Arrange regular check-ins with staff to monitor well-being.
• Facilitate referral for further support or counselling if required.
What can team leaders do?

• Promote cohesive teams with high morale.
• Cultivate a culture of safety, non-judgment and care.
• Discuss moral and ethical challenges.
• Discuss PMIEs and potential social, emotional, and behavioural responses to exposures.
• Check-in with personnel regularly.
• Encourage debriefing.
• Acknowledge and affirm experiences shared by staff.
• Model positive coping skills and encourage self-care and help-seeking.
How can we self-care outside of the workplace?

- Learn more about moral stressors and moral injury.
- Eat and rest well, exercise, and maintain social connections.
- Engage in stress reduction activities (relaxation therapy, mindfulness or other meditation).
- Engage in self-reflection and expression activities.
- Connect with peers and support colleagues with shared experiences.
- Seek professional support if they are feeling distressed or troubled by their experiences.
Role of the community and government

The community and government must not overlook our responsibilities for:

- The quality treatment of healthcare workers, and
- The development of accurate and respectful narratives regarding the difficult professional choices they may be forced to make.
Moral Injury Toolkit for Leaders

MORAL INJURY
WHAT IS IT AND WHAT CAN LEADERS DO ABOUT IT?

MAPPING YOUR ASSETS
LOOKING THROUGH A NEW LENS
Thank you!

For further information, please contact me at:

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Questions?
Contact Us!

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