

What’s Your EQ?

When care team members cultivate self-awareness, it can boost the strength of the entire team.

By Anne Geske

There it was in her inbox: an email asking Amanda (not her real name) to participate in a deposition for a child abuse suit. Amanda, a risk manager, had anticipated this moment, and for a second, she thought it might send her into a tailspin. A year earlier, a similar event caused her to spend weeks working through her emotions. When she learned about emotional intelligence (EI), Amanda became aware that this type of suit was likely to be an ongoing trigger because she grew up in the foster care system, having experienced abuse. Determined to arm herself for the next time this situation might arise, Amanda had practiced her EI skills, and she was able to manage her emotions better this time around.

Dan Goleman popularized the term “emotional intelligence” in his 1996 book of the same name. EI refers to the ability to recognize and manage one’s emotions and extrapolate these skills to relationships and social settings. In his book, Goleman cited research in which Harvard Business School found that EI—or “EQ,” as it’s sometimes called—was more important than IQ and technical skills in determining a person’s ability to navigate complex situations successfully.

Michelle Kinneer, PhD, JD, MSN, RN, CPHRM, CHPC, CHC, risk and patient safety education manager at Constellation, spent much of her professional career in patient safety and risk management and recently studied EI as it relates to professional quality of life for her PhD dissertation. Through her work, Kinneer has seen firsthand how EI can be a key component of coping with traumatic events and eventually moving past them.

Health care workers give to others, Kinneer explains, but they don’t always take care of themselves, leaving them vulnerable to difficulties when adverse outcomes happen in the course of their daily work. “Where EI comes into play,” says Kinneer, “is knowing yourself. By understanding your emotional self, you will not only understand the potential impact of situations, but you will be able to better manage your response to the event. Ultimately, this has a positive impact, allowing health care providers to continue to give to others.”

Knowing yourself also means knowing when you need help—and being able to ask for it. When clinicians like Amanda develop their EI skills for wellbeing on (and off) the job, they’re better able to interact professionally and appropriately with team members and patients.

Supporting emotional health and emotional intelligence

Kinneer recommends several ways health care leaders might

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support the development of EI skills and overall workplace wellbeing after adverse events:

- ✓ Understand that care team members go through a phase of self-questioning after adverse events.
- ✓ Reach out to discover what teams need; be attuned to their needs after an event.
- ✓ Allow care team members to process their emotions through third-party (non-management) means, such as a peer-to-peer program.
- ✓ Recognize that emotional processing and debriefings/analysis are separate things.
- ✓ Tell care teams that root cause analysis (RCA) is a blame-free, safe zone, and reiterate this message throughout the analysis. RCA is there to learn from and to possibly prevent similar events from occurring.
- ✓ Facilitate different channels to process emotions, such as wellbeing programs and physical spaces for team members to congregate.
- ✓ Encourage team members to utilize resources, including the attorney, if a claim has been filed.

Kinneer will speak on “The Resilient Risk Manager: Steps to Strengthen Emotional Intelligence” at the ASHRM 2019 Annual Conference in October. She’ll provide an in-depth review of her quantitative dissertation study, which examines risk managers’ resilience by comparing use of workplace emotional intelligence skills with the experience of professional quality of life.

Resources

- “Emotional Intelligence 2.0” by Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves
- “Working With Emotional Intelligence” by Daniel Goleman

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