

Mental Health Care in Dentistry: A Trauma Informed Approach to Suicide Prevention



Course Author(s): Lara Mekhitarian, LMFT

CE Credits: 1.5 hours

Intended Audience: Dentists, Dental Hygienists, Dental Assistants, Office Managers, Dental Students, Dental Hygiene Students, Dental Assistant Students

Date Course Online: 10/08/2020

Last Revision Date: N/A

Course Expiration Date: 10/07/2023

Cost: Free

Method: Self-instructional

AGD Subject Code(s): 153

Online Course: www.dentalcare.com/en-us/professional-education/ce-courses/ce645

Disclaimers:

- P&G is providing these resource materials to dental professionals. We do not own this content nor are we responsible for any material herein.
- Participants must always be aware of the hazards of using limited knowledge in integrating new techniques or procedures into their practice. Only sound evidence-based dentistry should be used in patient therapy.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement

- Ms. Mekhitarian has no financial interests to disclose relating to the content of this presentation. She has no conflicts of interest associated with this course.

Introduction – Suicide Prevention

Mental health conditions and life stressors are the leading cause of suicide amongst healthcare professionals. The goal of this course is to help educate dental professionals in understanding the prevalence of untreated depression, trauma, and suicidality. Using a trauma-informed lens, this course will provide dental professionals with resources, strategies, and information to help decrease the risk factors when faced with trauma, depression, and anxiety.

Course Contents

- Overview
- Learning Objectives
- Video
- Course Test
- References / Additional Resources
- About the Author

Overview

Mental health conditions and life stressors are the leading cause of suicide amongst healthcare professionals, especially in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Heightened depression resulting from sudden life changes has increased suicidality within dentistry and a lack of psychoeducation in prevention and treatment further increases the risk. The goal of this course is to help educate dental professionals in understanding the prevalence of untreated depression, trauma, and suicidality. Using a trauma-informed lens, this course will provide dental professionals with resources, strategies, and information to help decrease the risk factors when faced with trauma, depression, and anxiety.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, the dental professional should be able to:

- Develop a clear understanding of traumatic stress including symptoms, behaviors, and somatic impacts.
- Develop self-awareness in identifying the impacts of depression and trauma.
- Understand why suicidality is prevalent within the dentistry profession.
- Understand the difference between passive and active suicidal ideations.
- Develop individual coping, mindfulness, and self-care strategies.
- Understand the importance of a safety plan and collateral support.
- Develop strategies to support those around you struggling with depression.

Video



[Click on image to view video online.](#)

Course Test Preview

To receive Continuing Education credit for this course, you must complete the online test. Please go to: www.dentalcare.com/en-us/professional-education/ce-courses/ce645/test

1. **Developing a clear understanding of traumatic stress includes _____.**
 - A. symptoms, behaviors, and somatic impacts
 - B. changes in family and relationship dynamics
 - C. chronic illness and a drop in immunity
 - D. understanding the societal impacts

2. **Vicarious Trauma is _____.**
 - A. a direct traumatic experience where you are the victim
 - B. loss of a loved one
 - C. the emotional residue of exposure with people who hear traumatic stories and witness the pain, fear, and terror that trauma survivors have endured
 - D. being next to the victim during a traumatic incident

3. **Traumatic grief is reserved for the death of a loved one.**
 - A. True
 - B. False

4. **Hyperarousal is _____.**
 - A. immobilization and numbness
 - B. reduced physical movement and absence of sensation
 - C. increased sensations, emotional reactivity, and hypervigilance
 - D. disassociation

5. **The Window of Tolerance _____.**
 - A. highlights an understanding of our emotional bandwidth and what happens when we experience a life event that throws us out of our ability to cope
 - B. are the physical symptoms of a traumatic impact
 - C. is the ability to tolerate traumatic experiences regardless of severity in a resilient way
 - D. learning how to cope with things in a non-judgmental way

6. **Causes of high stress in dentistry do NOT include _____.**
 - A. confinement & isolation
 - B. economic pressure from school and building a practice
 - C. challenges with co-workers
 - D. perfectionistic behaviors

7. **Those who are displaying signs of suicidality tend to be very social and engaging with those around them and have no difficulty articulating their feelings.**
 - A. True
 - B. False

8. **The power of coping strategies is designed to _____.**
 - A. develop a stronger sense of self
 - B. develop resiliency, self-awareness, and create growth
 - C. help individuals stay continually happy no matter what challenges arise
 - D. to help individuals deal with their problems on their own

- 9. What are the main components of safety planning?**
- A. Develop internal and external coping strategies and creating a circle of support.
 - B. To ensure that a person is hospitalized at the first sign of hopelessness and stays in an inpatient facility.
 - C. To ensure a person has something in place to make family and friends feel comfortable.
 - D. To educate a person on trauma.
- 10. One way a dental practice can support its employees who are struggling with the trauma of COVID and recent world events is to _____.**
- A. have staff retreats twice a year
 - B. bring in an onsite therapist to work individually with each staff member
 - C. create a community of support that allows for debriefing sessions, putting employee support protocols in place for major events, and creating a list of resources available to staff
 - D. engage in physical activity

References

1. Marich J. Trauma's Physical and Emotional Toll on the Body. Gulf Bend Center. Accessed September 24, 2020.
2. Robinson L, Smith M, Segal J. Emotional and Psychological Trauma. HelpGuide. February 2020. Accessed September 24, 2020.
3. Window of Tolerance adapted from Ogden, Minton, & Pain, 2006, p.27, 32; Corrigan, Fisher & Nutt, 2010, p.2.
4. 10 Facts About Physician Suicide and Mental Health. American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Accessed September 24, 2020.
5. Lahoda B. Mental Illness and Suicide in Dental School: Fighting the Stigma. ADA Center for Professional Success. Mental Health Resources. Accessed September 24, 2020.
6. Alexander RE. Stress-related suicide by dentists and other health care workers. Fact or folklore?. J Am Dent Assoc. 2001;132(6):786-794. doi:10.14219/jada.archive.2001.0278.
7. Lang R. Stress in Dentistry – It Could Kill You! Oral Health Group.ADA Center for Professional Success. Mental Health Resources. September 1, 2007. Accessed September 24, 2020.
8. Gawel R. Suicide and Dentistry: Myths, Realities, and Prevention, Dentistry Today. July 2016. Accessed September 24, 2020.
9. Stone DM, Holland KM, Bartholow B, et al. Preventing Suicide: A Technical Package of Policies, Programs, and Practices. Atlanta, GA. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. October 2017. Accessed September 24, 2020.
10. Moutier C. Creating a Safety Net: Preventing Physician Suicide. AAMC. September 29, 2016. Accessed September 24, 2020.

Additional Resources

- No Additional Resources Available.

About the Author

Lara Mekhitarian, LMFT



Lara Mekhitarian is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and a Trauma Specialist who has dedicated her career to working with people affected by trauma, especially those who have suffered abuse. She is certified in Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), the Trauma Resiliency Model, and she is trained in the Havening Technique. She has worked with people with an array of mental health difficulties including suicidality, traumatic grief and loss, women's issues, couples, and teens. She has served as a trilingual therapist to a multitude of populations and cultures. Lara earned her Master of Arts in Marriage and Family Therapy from Pacific Oaks College and her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from California State University, Los Angeles. As a former professor at Pepperdine University, Lara has a strong background in education and has done an array of trainings for staff and faculty at various companies including JPL, City of Burbank, City of Oxnard, Calty Design Research, LA Philharmonic, and Cedars Sinai Hospital. She has also done many trainings for California State Universities in Southern California, to help staff and faculty build a strong and effective working environment. Currently she has a private group practice in La Crescenta, CA called Heal the Hurt Counseling (www.HealTheHurt.com), a business and life coaching practice (www.ThriveByLara.com), and an onsite EAP provider for Cedars Sinai Hospital through Empathia LifeMatters.

Email: lara@healthehurt.com