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Exposure to suicide at work: How to manage incidents and support staff and consumers

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Many of the 2,088 Australians who died by suicide in 2016 were employees of some type. Based on Cerel et al. research over a ¼ Million Australians could have been affected. However, if the deceased had a significant role within a business, lengthy collegial relationships, or strong relationships with clients/consumers the number exposed to, or affected by the death could be exponentially larger. Any workplace can be impacted by suicide through staff witness the incident, discovering a body, losing a client, another staff member or someone they cared about by suicide. Knowing trauma reactions and grief can impact on personal functioning and productivity, the impact of suicide and duty of care to prevent and mitigate psychological injury in any workplace is a significant issue for its management. Further, if an employee witnessed the suicide or discovered the body the complexity of trauma for the staff member/s is immense. There is little awareness of the potential impact among workplaces, so they generally are underprepared. Through practice, this presenter is aware of the diverse range of businesses and staff roles most likely to be impacted including hospitality, cleaning, medical, transport, legal and emergency services. Also of the personal impacts on teams and clients; and important aspects to manage according to best practice. Responding to suicide is a unique set of circumstances, not generally included in management courses or organizational policies. Therefore, this presentation will heighten awareness about the potential of such an event occurring and outline matters to core considerations when managing incidents for individual employees, customers and the business as a whole. It will suggest effective strategies and sources to build the business's critical incident and response capacity. Also how best to support staff sensitively, assist them to return to work, and manage possible repercussions across the business.

Biography

Cheryl Staal has extensive experience in suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention and has supported many clients affected by suicide as a witness, discovering a body or losing someone they cared about. She presents unique evidenced-based best practice training she designed for workplaces to manage incidents and support staff exposed to suicide. Having been bereaved by suicide herself enables her to meld personal and practical experience, theories, and skills to guide practitioners, businesses, and others. Cheryl has spoken at many conferences regarding suicide, impacts on witnesses/discoverers, domestic violence, elder abuse and other societal issues. Along with advising organizations and government on designing and implementing integrated services suicide, domestic violence, and elder abuse fields. She is also highly skilled in providing professional supervision and professional development training for practitioners and workplaces.

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