

Suicide Care Insights: Just Culture

Video Transcript

Kathy: A couple of years ago, I was in a session with a client when my email dinged. Out of habit I glanced at it and saw the word “overdose” and the name of another client. My heart sank, my brain shut off, and my client’s voice faded from my ears.

Later that same morning I received another email stating an incident report was due by the end of the day. To complete it I needed to review my notes thoroughly and answer a dozen questions about what I did and didn’t do.

Sadé: Rates of burnout, stress, and anxiety in health care professionals are alarmingly high, and many are leaving the field. It has put an enormous strain on health and behavioral healthcare systems. The very people we leaned on through the deadliest and scariest parts of the pandemic are now in desperate need of help themselves.

Kathy: Towards the end of the day, I went to my supervisor. I told her how horrible it had been to find out about my client’s overdose by email. It was cold, impersonal, and so very jarring.

At that time, overdoses were so common all the clinicians received the information that way. It was just the way they did it. My supervisor hadn’t even considered how a clinician might feel getting that information in an email.

Sadé: In a just culture, learning from experiences and client safety —not rank or title—are at the center of client care and decision-making. Leadership commits to a culture of safety for those in care – and those who provide care. A just culture helps staff feel supported, appreciated, and safe. And this should help retain staff during this current workforce shortage.

Kathy: Years later when another client died from suicide my supervisor told me privately at the end of my day, giving me time and space to absorb and process the information. She offered to connect me with our EAP, encouraged me to take the following day off, and continued to check in with me. Most importantly, she assured me that it was not my fault. I—we—had done everything possible to help him.

Although no one called this change to our protocol “Just culture,” that’s what it was, and that’s what it looks like. When the system fails and you question yourself, the organization insulates and supports you without blame.

This transcript is for “Suicide Care Insights: Just Culture,” part of the *Suicide Care Insights: Stories & Tips to Cultivate Your Implementation* series on [ZeroSuicide.com](https://zerosuicide.com).

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