

Peer Assistance & Impairment in the CRNA Community: Overview

Awareness & Resources

- Many students and providers are unfamiliar with the AANA Peer Assistance Panel, but it's an important resource.
- The AANA offers a confidential helpline (800-654-5167) for those facing substance use, mental health issues, or licensing concerns.
- Access to promotional tools like business cards may be limited or need troubleshooting.
- It's critical to understand mandatory reporting obligations, especially as they pertain to your institution.

Challenges in Recognition

- The typical CRNA student landscape includes competitive admissions, long hours, financial stress, family/relationship strain, and reduced time for self-care.
- These factors make it very difficult to distinguish between normal stress and actual impairment.

Approach to Suspected Impairment

- **DON'T:** Confront someone directly, tip them off, investigate alone, remain silent, spread rumors, or feel guilty for reporting — you might save someone's career.
- **DO:** Document concerns, report to the program administrator, follow institutional policy, contact the AANA helpline, and respect confidentiality. Take action early.

Signs of Impairment

- **Early Signs:** Mood swings, isolation, poor hygiene or attire, changes in clinical practice, med waste, frequent sick calls, and underperformance.
- **Late Signs:** Drug diversion evidence, charting discrepancies, visible intoxication, pupil changes, physical decline, increased hours, or refusal to test.

Program Administrator's Responsibilities

- Ensure institutional legal compliance, protect patient/public safety, and support the impaired provider.
- Acknowledge the trauma involved for everyone — and prioritize safe, ethical handling of these cases.

Safe Intervention Strategies

- Should only be done with trained personnel. Involves:
 - Gathering evidence
 - Conducting interviews with backup

- Ordering drug tests
Having treatment options lined up
- Never sending the person home alone
- Involving family/support systems
- Contacting the AANA Helpline

Reentry & Recovery

- Not everyone may be a candidate to return.
- Requirements: completion of treatment, state monitoring, legal/licensure clearance, random drug tests, potential practice restrictions.
- Institutions should have clear, supportive reentry policies that consider each case individually.

Confidentiality & Support Pathways

- Options include FMLA, short-term disability, inpatient programs, and alternatives to disciplinary action through state boards.
- Voluntary entry into a state-monitored program may offer a more supportive recovery pathway.

Barriers to Seeking Help

- Common reasons people don't seek help: stigma, fear of repercussions, professional expectations, denial, cultural norms, financial strain, and fear of the unknown.

How to Seek Help

- Start with the AANA helpline.
- Explore institutional policies and state alternative-to-discipline programs (can be anonymous at first).
- Talk to trusted friends or family for support.

Knowing Your Environment

- Consider whether your workplace is conducive to recovery.
- Prioritize health, advocate for yourself, and follow structured recovery plans.
- Stay connected to support systems, share your journey when appropriate, and work to reduce stigma for others.

Stress & PTSD in Healthcare Providers: Overview

Signs & Symptoms of Stress

- **Emotional & Behavioral:**
 - Increased irritability, impatience, crying, blaming, arguing

- Desire to isolate, anxiety, fear, anger, distrust, sadness
- Frustration, guilt, resentment, confusion, worry, uncertainty
- Increased substance use (alcohol, drugs, tobacco)
- Difficulty giving or accepting help
- Trouble concentrating, making decisions, or finding joy
- **Physical:**
 - Headaches, stomach aches, other aches/pains
 - Fatigue, changes in appetite or activity levels
 - Worsening of chronic health problems
 - Heightened startle response
- **Mental Health:**
 - Re-experiencing past trauma or PTSD
 - Intrusive memories, flashbacks, distressing recollections

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

- **Definition:** A mental health condition triggered by experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event.
- **Prevalence:** Affects approximately 6% of people during their lifetime.
- **Main Symptoms:**
 - **Re-experiencing:** flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive thoughts
 - **Avoidance:** avoiding reminders or feelings related to trauma
 - **Hyperarousal:** being easily startled, on edge, difficulty sleeping or concentrating

Resources for Immediate & Ongoing Help

Crisis Support

- **911:** For emergencies requiring police, fire, or EMS
- **Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:** Dial **988** or text 988 for 24/7 support
- **Veterans:** Press "1" after calling 988, or text **838255**

Non-Crisis Support

- Speak with a mental health professional
- Access resources through AANA: aana.com/PTSD

Online Tools & Information

- **PTSD Self-Screening Tool:**
[Mental Health America PTSD Screening](#)
- **Helpful Educational Resources:**
 - [National Center for PTSD](#)
 - [National Institute of Mental Health](#)
 - [VA PTSD Treatment Decision Aid](#)

Burnout & Compassion Fatigue in Healthcare

Burnout

- Caused by **prolonged exposure to stressful occupational situations**
- Leads to emotional exhaustion, reduced sense of accomplishment, and depersonalization

Compassion Fatigue

- Result of **continuous care for others in distress**, especially without adequate support
- Can feel like secondary trauma; common in caregiving professions

Ways to Mitigate Burnout & Compassion Fatigue

- **Use time off** – Prioritize rest and recovery
- **Lean on peer support** – Talk to colleagues who understand
- **Find work-life balance** – Set boundaries between personal and professional life
- **Make self-care a priority** – Hobbies, sleep, exercise, mindfulness
- **Limit alcohol or drug use** – Avoid self-medicating
- **Focus on mental health** – Seek professional help when needed

Helpful Resources

- **AANA Stress Management:** aana.com/stress
- **Grief Support Videos:** [HPNA YouTube Channel](#)
- **Burnout Tips from Nurses:** [NurseJournal Guide](#)

Support Groups & Recovery Communities

- **Anesthetists in Recovery** (via AANA Peer Support)
- **Al-Anon Family Groups:** al-anon.org
- **Alcoholics Anonymous:** aa.org
- **Narcotics Anonymous:** na.org
- **Faces and Voices of Recovery:** facesandvoicesofrecovery.org

Second Victim Syndrome

Definition

A *second victim* is a healthcare provider who becomes traumatized following a critical or adverse event, often experiencing guilt, self-doubt, or emotional distress.

Support Strategies

- **Informal peer support:** Active listening in a safe, present, and nonjudgmental space

- **Referral when needed:** It's *okay* to refer colleagues to EAP or mental health professionals
- **Emergency situations:** Call 911 if there is immediate danger

When to Seek Help

- Persistent or interfering stress symptoms
- Recurring intrusive thoughts
- Feelings of isolation
- Increased reliance on alcohol or medication
- Trouble concentrating
- Changes in work performance or relationships
- Sleep disturbances

Note: While resources such as the [ForYOU Program \(MU Health\)](#), [AHRQ PSNet](#), and the Johns Hopkins RISE Program are often cited for second victim support, some links were inaccessible in this module (broken links)

Guidelines for Critical Stress Management: Sleep & Fatigue

Why it matters

CRNAs and RRNAs are particularly vulnerable to fatigue from long shifts and high stress, which can impair cognitive function and increase risk of errors.

Sleep Hygiene Tips

- Aim for 7–9 hours of sleep each night
- Sleep in a cool, dark, quiet room
- Remove electronic devices before bed – avoid blue light
- Avoid alcohol and heavy meals before bedtime
- Stick to a consistent sleep schedule, even on weekends
- Try power naps (15–20 minutes) during the day
- Develop a relaxing bedtime routine (e.g., warm bath, reading)
- Exercise regularly—but not too close to bedtime

Disruptive Behavior & Workplace Bullying

Definition: Deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm an individual. It can manifest as:

- Rudeness
- Dirty looks
- Spreading rumors
- Condescending tone
- Yelling
- Physical violence

Impact

Disruptive behaviors have emotional and physical consequences for the targeted individuals, leading to:

- Increased absenteeism
- Higher staff turnover
- Decreased morale and psychological safety

Mitigation Strategies

- Establish zero-tolerance policies
- Provide workshops on respectful communication and professional behavior
- Ensure leadership visibility in clinical areas
- Deliver in-services (individual and group) on identifying, reporting, and managing bullying

Suicide Risk in Healthcare Providers

The demanding nature of nursing and anesthesia professions results in elevated levels of stress and depression, contributing to a higher suicide rate among nurses compared to the general population.

Warning Signs

- Verbal clues or direct threats
- Noticeable deviation from usual behavior
- Social withdrawal
- Reckless or risky behavior
- Mood swings
- Disrupted sleep patterns
- Increased use of alcohol or medication to cope

Wellness & Support Resources

Institutions can foster resilience and mental health through wellness initiatives, such as:

- On-site gyms or discounted memberships
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)
- Nutrition and smoking cessation support
- Discounted health and wellness services for students and families

Health vs. Wellness

- **Health:** The absence of disease and a state of balance, where individuals can meet the daily demands of life and achieve an equilibrium.

- **Wellness:** An active practice of healthy habits daily. It involves thriving, not just surviving. Wellness is about a lifestyle choice and balancing various aspects of life, not one singular thing. It's the ongoing pursuit of holistic health.

Wellness Components

Nutrition

A healthy diet is essential for preventing diseases like diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular conditions. It also improves mood, memory, and helps maintain a healthy weight.

- Key components: Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats.
- **Strategies:**
 - Practice portion control (e.g., using smaller plates)
 - Snack healthily
 - Stay hydrated (e.g., with lemon in water)
 - Eat the healthy items first to reduce intake of unhealthy foods

Movement

Physical activity is crucial for both the body and mind. It supports learning, weight management, immunity, cardiovascular health, and overall well-being.

- **Benefits:**
 - Increased muscle strength
 - Improved bone density and balance
 - More energy
 - Better sleep
- Aim for 150 minutes of intense exercise per week, including aerobic activity, strength training, and balance exercises.
- Incorporate a variety of activities (e.g., hiking, dancing), and consider using a fitness tracker to stay motivated.

Light

Exposure to natural light regulates the circadian rhythm, controlling sleep cycles and promoting alertness during the day. Sunlight helps with vitamin D synthesis and supports mood regulation.

- **Benefits:**
 - Promotes melatonin production for better sleep
 - Strengthens bones and teeth with calcium and phosphorus
 - Reduces the effects of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)
- **Strategies:**

- Maximize exposure to natural light (e.g., outdoor walks during lunch)
- Use artificial light carefully, avoiding excessive blue light
- Create a sleep-friendly environment

Sleep

Sleep is vital for overall health, affecting weight management, stress reduction, decision-making, and repair processes in the body. Quality sleep is just as important as quantity.

- **Benefits:**
 - Reduces the risk of diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, and stress
 - Helps with learning, memory, and repair of tissues
- **Strategies:**
 - Maintain a consistent bedtime and wake-up time
 - Create a dark, quiet, cool sleeping environment
 - Avoid caffeine and heavy meals before bed
 - Practice relaxation techniques (e.g., warm bath, reading)
 - Aim for **7+ hours** of sleep each night, with deep, uninterrupted sleep

Mental Health

Mental health is crucial to overall well-being. Practices like mindfulness and stress management help stay grounded in the present and foster a positive outlook.

- **Strategies:**
 - Practice mindfulness and self-awareness
 - Use deep breathing exercises and meditation for stress management
 - Cultivate a positive mindset through affirmations and gratitude
 - Spend time in nature and engage in leisure activities
 - Seek therapy or counseling for additional support

Purpose and Meaning

Having a sense of purpose can lower mortality rates, improve decision-making, and create a sense of fulfillment in life. It doesn't have to be grand—small, meaningful actions count.

- **Strategies:**
 - Engage in activities that bring joy (e.g., traveling, volunteering, hobbies)
 - Self-reflect on values, passions, and strengths
 - Set goals that align with personal and professional values (e.g., being a CRNA)

Social Connections

Building and maintaining relationships are key to a fulfilling life. Regular interaction with family, friends, and community enhances emotional well-being and provides support.

- **Strategies:**
 - Schedule regular time with loved ones
 - Join clubs or groups that align with your interests
 - Volunteer or help others in need to create meaningful connections

Listening-Focused Communication Strategies

Effective communication is a cornerstone of patient safety and care, with 27% of malpractice cases linked to communication breakdowns. Listening carefully not only reduces stress but also promotes connectivity and fosters better problem-solving.

The Importance of Listening:

- Listening is essential—it's about hearing with thoughtful consideration, not just waiting to respond.
- **Must Understand:** Truly grasp the message before replying. This prevents misunderstandings and promotes a collaborative environment.

Key Strategies for Active Listening

1. **Reflect and Repeat:**
 - Summarize what's being said to ensure you've understood the key points.
 - Reflect on the message before responding to convey that you're engaged.
2. **Be Attentive:**
 - Focus on the speaker. Avoid distractions (e.g., checking phones or multitasking).
 - If necessary, ensure the conversation takes place in a private location to ensure confidentiality and reduce distractions.
3. **Provide Time:**
 - Give the speaker ample time to express their thoughts and feelings.
 - Avoid rushing or cutting off their communication.
4. **Think Before You Respond:**
 - Pause before responding to ensure a thoughtful reply.
 - Avoid jumping to conclusions; take the time to understand fully before reacting.

Practical Communication Techniques:

- **Ask Open-Ended Questions:** Encourage detailed responses that provide more insight.
- **Request Clarification:** If something is unclear, ask for elaboration to avoid miscommunication.
- **Summarize Key Points:** Summarize the main points of the discussion to confirm understanding.
- **Avoid Interrupting:** Resist the urge to interject or provide personal opinions, especially during sensitive topics.
- **Show Patience:** Display empathy and remain patient, even during lengthy conversations.

Second Victim Syndrome (SVS) in Healthcare Providers

Second Victim Syndrome (SVS) refers to the psychological and emotional trauma experienced by healthcare providers who are involved in an unanticipated adverse patient event, medical error, or patient-related injury. In these situations, there are **two victims**: the patient and the healthcare provider.

Key Concepts:

- **Healthcare Providers as Victims:** When a patient is seriously injured or a medical error occurs, the healthcare provider may feel emotionally traumatized and responsible for the event, even though they may not be at fault. This emotional burden can lead to feelings of inadequacy, stress, and guilt.
- **SVS Impact on Providers:** Anesthesia providers, among others, may face challenges in processing adverse events. Often, they are expected to continue providing care without the opportunity to debrief, leading to compounded stress. In unsupportive environments, the feeling of being blamed can exacerbate the trauma.
- **Emotional Consequences:** Unresolved SVS can result in persistent sadness, anxiety, frustration, guilt, and even physical symptoms like insomnia, muscle tension, and GI issues. If left unaddressed, it can lead to burnout, mental health issues, or even a career change.

Causes and Triggers of SVS:

1. **Adverse Patient Events:**
 - Errors, unexpected patient injuries, or death.
 - Pediatric patients, especially those who share traits with the provider or their family, can be more emotionally taxing.
 - Medical errors and unexpected survival after resuscitation are high-risk triggers.
2. **Environmental and Workplace Factors:**
 - A lack of support from supervisors and colleagues can increase stress.
 - A blaming culture or unsupportive work environments contribute significantly to emotional distress.
 - Unresolved trauma can lead to persistent symptoms if not addressed properly.
3. **Patient-Related Events:**
 - Patient death or near-death situations.
 - Challenging interactions, workplace violence, and patient suicide can also be significant emotional stressors.

Signs and Symptoms of SVS:

Physical Symptoms:

- Insomnia
- Muscle tension

- Fatigue
- GI issues (e.g., nausea, indigestion)
- Increased heart rate or hypertension
- Headaches

Emotional Symptoms:

- Anxiety, depression, guilt, and grief
- Frustration, shock, or disbelief
- Remorse, fear, and doubt about skills
- Feelings of hopelessness, loneliness, and shame
- Flashbacks or intrusive thoughts about the event
- Decreased joy or meaning in work
- Loss of self-esteem and confidence in clinical skills
- Social withdrawal and avoidance of patient care

Consequences of Unresolved SVS:

1. **Mental Health Issues:** Unresolved SVS can lead to chronic mental health concerns, including depression and suicidal thoughts.
2. **Career Crisis:** Providers may face a professional crisis and may even change careers or leave the profession due to emotional trauma.
3. **Substance Misuse:** In some cases, unhealthy coping mechanisms such as substance misuse can develop as a response to emotional pain.
Decreased Job Satisfaction: Providers suffering from SVS may experience burnout, loss of meaning in their work, and diminished job satisfaction.

High-Risk Situations for SVS:

1. Patient Death or Severe Injury
2. Pediatric Patients, particularly those who resemble family members or themselves
3. Medical Errors and Near Misses
4. Unexpected Survival after resuscitation
5. Workplace Violence
6. Patient Suicide or attempted suicide
7. Adverse Events (including complications from COVID-19)
8. Challenging Interactions with patients or colleagues
9. Bomb threats, code blue situations, and other high-stress events

Strategies for Mitigating SVS:

1. **Create Supportive Environments:**
 - Encourage a debriefing culture after adverse events.
 - Supportive leadership can help minimize feelings of blame and isolation.
2. **Peer Support:**

- Establish mentorship programs or peer support groups where healthcare providers can safely discuss their emotions and experiences.
 - Open communication about the impact of adverse events is key to reducing isolation and fostering resilience.
3. **Provide Mental Health Resources:**
 - Provide mental health support, such as access to counseling and wellness programs, to help providers process trauma.
 4. **Education and Training:**
 - Offer training for healthcare providers to recognize the signs of SVS in themselves and their colleagues, and to understand how to seek help.

Active Listening Strategies:

1. **Paraphrasing/Restating:** Repeat what you hear to confirm understanding.
 - Example: "What I hear you saying is..."
2. **Open-Ended Questions/Statements:** Encourage exploration and elicit detailed responses.
 - Example: "Tell me more..." or "How are you feeling about this?"
3. **Clarifying Questions/Statements:** Help to focus on emotions and avoid specific event details, especially when legal concerns may exist.
 - Example: "Let's focus on how you're feeling right now."
4. **Encouraging:** Provide verbal cues to show that you're actively listening and empathizing.
 - Example: "I hear you. I'm here to support you."
5. **Feedback:** Offer interpretations to help organize their thoughts and validate emotions.
 - Example: "It sounds like this has been really challenging for you."
6. **Normalizing:** Help them understand their emotional reactions are normal.
 - Example: "These feelings are common in response to such an event."
7. **Concluding Conversations:** Provide resources, thank them for their vulnerability, and offer further support.
 - Example: "Thank you for sharing this with me. Let's check in again soon."

General Principles for Effective Peer Support:

- Non-judgmental approach is essential.
- Acknowledging courage is important when a colleague shares difficult emotions.
- Encourage healthy coping mechanisms, such as stress-relief activities.

Supporting Someone in Crisis:

1. **Use of Words Like Suicide:**
 - It's important to be direct but sensitive when discussing suicide. Using the word "suicide" does not necessarily make someone think about it more, but it can open the door for necessary conversations.

- Be clear with your intentions: ask if they will seek help and offer to support them. An example: “Will you come with me to get help?”
- 2. **Encouraging Help-Seeking Behavior:**
 - It’s crucial to stay with them and help them reach out for professional support. Your role is to ensure they don’t feel alone in this process.
- 3. **Promise Not to Harm Themselves:**
 - A request like, “Promise me you won’t harm yourself” can reinforce the urgency and the importance of seeking help.
- 4. **Referral and Staying with Them:**
 - Referral means connecting them with the appropriate help or resources, whether that’s a therapist, crisis hotline, or a trusted person.
 - Stay with them as they make the call, providing emotional support during this crucial time.

Emotional Intelligence:

1. **Self-Awareness:**
 - This involves being conscious of your own emotions, strengths, and weaknesses. It’s about knowing what drives you and being aware of how your actions can impact others.
2. **Self-Management:**
 - Self-management is about controlling your actions and reactions based on your emotional awareness. It involves being able to pause and choose how to behave in stressful situations rather than acting impulsively. You can put your feelings aside to manage them appropriately in a moment of crisis.
3. **Social Awareness:**
 - Social awareness is the ability to recognize and understand the emotions of others, even if you don’t necessarily agree with their perspective. This helps in offering support in a compassionate way and ensures the other person feels heard and validated.