

The Medical Examiner Work Stress and Health Project: An Update on the Web-based Intervention Program

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Introduction: The Medical Examiner Work Stress and Health Project is designed to investigate and address the types of work stressors facing personnel working in medico-legal death investigation. In Phase I of the project, we conducted a needs assessment survey with over 400 medical examiner and coroner employees across the US. Phase I was designed to identify salient work stressors and to determine the relationship of stress exposure to symptoms of depression and PTSD. Two significant work stressors associated with increased risk included stress related to working with the families of the deceased and exposure to disturbing cases including the deaths of children. For Phase II of the project, we developed a web-based intervention designed to provide advanced training in working with families and managing complex and difficult cases. The web based intervention is a low intensity tailored psycho-educational program consisting of 16 brief classes an average of 10 minutes in length. Actors portray medical examiner personnel or family members of the deceased and describe common workplace situations. Narrators provide guidance for conceptualizing and responding to these situations. We are pilot testing the program for feasibility, acceptability, and effectiveness in reducing stress-related symptoms. This paper provides an update on the progress of the program.

Methods: The pilot program is currently underway in 9 offices in 6 states. Each office completes a three month period of baseline assessment and a three month period of training. At the beginning and end of the three month baseline period and at the end of the training, participants complete surveys assessing aspects of work life and health. We used a staggered time frame to permit offices in the baseline period to serve as controls for offices in the training phase. All surveys and the intervention classes are delivered via the web.

Results: To date, 3 offices have completed training with 80% of employees enrolling and 51% completing the full training. We have continued to refine the program and add new case examples based on feedback from participants. Participant ratings of course indicate a high degree of acceptability. For this paper, we will present videos of new case examples and discuss challenges and progress in delivering low intensity tailored interventions in the medical examiner workplace.

Conclusions: Web-based interventions can be successfully deployed to assist skill development in dispersed work forces.

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