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TABOO OR NOT TABOO? VIRTUAL REALITY RAISING AWARENESS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

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Background

The General Medical Council have been very clear on their stance on Sexual Harassment (S.H.) in the workplace. Since the publication of "Sexual assault in surgery: a painful truth" in September 2021, there has been a social media storm with doctors raising concerns and sharing their stories of sexual harassment. It has effectively led to a medical #MeToo movement. There is new Good Medical Practice guidance on sexual misconduct and S.H. in the UK.

S.H. should not be a taboo subject, but raising awareness and opening discussion on this subject can be challenging. Health Education England and Torbay Hospital's Digital Futures Programme have created an interactive and thought provoking prototype to share nationally. It utilises Virtual Reality (VR), allowing total immersion for users to share the discomfort and develop empathy from different perspectives of the victim, by-stander and perpetrator.

This VR experience is based on multiple true stories, which is uncomfortable yet has a strong impact on the delegates facilitating in engaging open discussions to recognise grooming behaviours. We received excellent feedback from local and regional sessions.

Pilot sessions at deanery level

TOTAL 40 participants

- Gastro MDT – 14 participants
- Combination of consultants, trainees, endoscopy Specialist nurses
- SouthWest Medical Education Conference – 26 participants over 4 sessions
- Specialist in medical education: medicine, nursing and midwifery

Who should participate;

It is intended to be used as a multi-disciplinary learning tool for any medical health professional.

Results

What extent would the VR raise the profile of SH in the workplace and enable their team to discuss it openly? 4.5/5 (Average)

92.5% would you use VR for future difficult topics teaching.

Discussion And Conclusion

- S.H. is a problem within the NHS – it is largely a taboo subject which is not adequately raised or rectified
- We created a training intervention using innovative digital technology with aims of increasing awareness of S.H., reducing stigma of speaking up and encouraging a culture shift
- We hope this intervention is successful for its intended purpose and create a national training standard for S.H. awareness in the NHS

Take Home Messages

Aims:

1. Raise the profile of a taboo subject, allowing people to feel comfortable discussing experienced or witnessed S.H.
2. Recognise/identify grooming behaviours.
3. Consider appropriate language usage around witnessing sexual harassment.
4. Discuss repercussion and people's reluctance to speak up in fear of hierarchy; it's consequences (continued behaviours).
5. Supporting change in culture of teams.
6. Discuss how and when to intervene, the support available and escalation processes. Support signposted in the final slide.

Reference

Arshad, H. (2022). RE: Sexual assault in surgery: a painful truth. *The Bulletin of the Royal College of Surgeons of England*, 104(2), pp.58–60. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1308/rcsbull.2022.37>.