

Secrets and Suicides

Category: Stress and Burnout

written by Naazia Azhar | April 5, 2018

I must disguise the truth.

Because of HIPAA.

I must hold these heavy truths within my small-framed body. Because of HIPAA, I can't tell you the real reasons I'm so upset—the death tolls, the suicides, the real-life people who are my patients and the real tragedies that they suffer. I have to change the identifying facts about this person or these people to the point that they are unrecognizable. They are my secret, my deep, dark secret that can fester inside of me and cause me to feel terrible. Incapable of saving. Inadequate at what I do, because what I am expected to do is everything.

And if I don't do everything, or if I do almost everything but forget to do one thing, then I can get called for a meeting with an administrator who cares about "quality improvement." And they will busy my life with more documentation, documentation that has nothing to do with looking a patient in the eye or hearing their story or *really* thinking about what help they need.

And if I don't do everything, or if I do almost everything but forget to do one thing, then I can get sued. And in this lawsuit, lawyers can rip apart my entire life and self-worth. I remind myself, "If you didn't document it, it didn't happen." But that is so unfair, because I don't document how I look at patients in the eye and listen to their stories undistracted and really think about what I can do to help them. But now, every day when I go to work, I must worry about a lawsuit that may or may not ever come about. And when I look in patients' eyes, I may start to see them as another bad outcome waiting to happen. An adverse event. A suicide. A lawsuit. Not as the person they are, who came to see me, another person, for some medical advice and support. You know—the doctor-patient relationship.

With my small-framed body, I have started to lift heavy weights. At the gym. I realized that sometimes to be emotionally strong, it helps to be physically strong.

You are a good doctor. Don't beat yourself up over this.

So what happens when the good doctors die? The details of their suicides will be protected by HIPAA.

Naazia Azhar

St. Louis, Missouri