

Statute of Limitations?

Category: Me, Too

written by Pamela Adelstein | January 18, 2023

What do you do when you hear about a sex assault that happened years ago, and you currently interact with the perpetrator in your daily life? What if that perpetrator is seemingly a nice person, and you are friends with his female partner and his family?

What if the perpetrator is a patient of yours, and you are also the primary care provider for his family?

What if the perpetrator is a coworker or a supervisor at your workplace, and you spend time together in meetings and engaged in work tasks?

What do you do if you knew a man who sexually assaulted women, and then meet that man again, years in the future, when you notice his unscathed daily life, devoid of the consequences of his actions?

I have experienced all these situations. How do I navigate them? I do not know the right answers. As a health care provider, I took an oath to do no harm. I am legally bound by HIPPA to protect the privacy of my patients. In the above cases, I need to have a relationship with the perpetrator. As a friend, I want to continue a friendship with my friend. As a physician, I must act in the best interests of said person. As a colleague, I need to peacefully coexist with the perpetrator. But I am also human, and I can't un-learn something that I now know.

The result: I live with internal chaos. I do the best I can with the messiness and try to do right by all parties involved. I hope that my behaviors do not somehow silently condone the perpetrator's actions. I walk the fine line of supporting and empathizing with the wronged woman and not over-empathizing with her.

I ask myself if it is better to know about the sex assault, or better not to know. If I share my knowledge of the situation with a trusted friend, family member or coworker, in an attempt to unburden myself of this situation, am I pushing these dilemmas unfairly onto my confidante?

Perhaps as the Me-Too movement becomes more widely ingrained in society, it will become easier to disclose experiences of sex assault and predatory behaviors, be believed, and the perpetrators held responsible. And then, at that point, society can start working on prevention. I fear that day is well into the distant future.

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