

KINTSUGI MIND: CLINICIANS CAN EMERGE FROM THE PANDEMIC WHOLE

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The Japanese practice an ancient art called Kintsugi. A craftsperson repairs broken pottery with gold or silver rendering it more beautiful than in its original state. Can clinicians engage in “Kintsugi Mind” and thereby emerge from this pandemic integrated and whole?

Yuan et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis including 88 studies of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following earlier pandemics and COVID-19. Health care professionals had the highest prevalence (26.9%) compared to infected cases and the public. Another type of trauma is called secondary or vicarious; it occurs when a person bears witness to suffering and death but remains powerless to change it; countless clinicians have experienced this over the past year. It manifests as emotional depletion, anxiety, insomnia, and impaired interpersonal relationships.

How can clinicians heal from their exposure to the pandemic? Post-traumatic growth (PTG) is defined as positive psychological changes following trauma. PTG manifests in five areas: appreciation of life, relating to others, personal strength, recognizing new possibilities, and spiritual change. A transformation in the person’s world view and their place in it ensues. For health care professionals who are experiencing emotional distress, insomnia, or manifest PTSD symptoms they may heal by engaging in the six “Rs.” These

are: relating, resourcing, repatterning, reprocessing, reflecting, and rituals. Both PTG and these six practices may contribute to Kintsugi Mind. While this appears to place the onus on individuals, it is crucial that leaders in the health care system implement programs enabling HCPs to be restored, rather than broken by this crisis. ■