

Department Head Blog October 5th, 2020

Last week, the Halifax Infirmary Emergency Department and administrative offices were put in lock-down when a death threat was phoned into the hospital. Lock-downs are not uncommon in any large urban ED, but this was more personal. Police quickly responded and completed a threat assessment. Affected individuals linked to the threat were personally notified to ensure their safety. The lock-down order was lifted several hours later. The following day, a suspect was arrested and charged. Thankfully, no one was physically hurt, but the event was traumatic, nonetheless. If you are having difficulty dealing with this, I would encourage you to reach out for support.

As I began to write this week's edition of the Blog, I had started to write that this event is, unfortunately, just par for the course in the operation of a busy tertiary care ED. But upon reflection, I reject this hypothesis. Attributing such heinous behaviour to the chaotic unpredictable environment of an ED in effect offers an excuse or justification for those actions and behaviours. Provision of emergency care is difficult but important work. Everyone should expect to be treated courteously and with respect. Our personal safety should most certainly never be threatened and is imperative that we speak out and feel supported when this is not the case.

But sometimes the threats to our department come from within. Although it is difficult to hear, in recent months there have been several reported incidents of racism and unprofessional behaviour within our own Department. Although sometimes unintentional, the hurt is just as real. I applaud those that have had the courage to give voice to their concerns and hope you know that you have been heard. We can and will do better. As a Department, we must find the same courage to look at our own conduct and to speak out when we witness behaviours that fall below accepted standards. Unprofessional conduct, racism, sexism and homophobia can only exist if we let them go unabated. It is no longer enough to just lead by example.

In her role as the Chief of Pediatric Emergency Medicine at the IWK, Dr. Katrina Hurley has been a true leader. Well respected by her colleagues, she has fostered a culture of physician wellness. She was recently recognized by CAEP/Women in Emergency Medicine as a local COVID Hero for this and for her tireless support of the IWK ED during the pandemic. Well done, Katrina!

Last week, Dr. Jason Emsley hosted the second evening in the East coast Fall Research Series. Dr. Venkatesh Thiruganasambandamoorthy, an award-winning researcher from Ottawa, kicked things off with his keynote address: "The Why, How, What and When". As many will remember, Venk spent a year working in our Department back in 2008. It was great to have him back home if only virtually! The event was another unqualified success with excellent presentations from a diverse group including staff physicians, residents and a nurse. Dr. Sean Hurley's study, "Resuscitative Endovascular Balloon Occlusion of the Aorta (REBOA) Candidacy Among Major Trauma Patients in Nova Scotia: Comparison of Clinical and Anatomical Criteria", was named top study for the evening. Again, a big thank you to the Research Council and Melissa MacDougall for another great night!

The Division of EMS continues with its strong track record of high-quality scholarship. Three recent publications illustrate both the academic strength and breadth of the division. "An application and frameworks for evaluating emergency department networks using location analysis and geographic information systems" was published in Computers and Industrial Engineering, "Outcomes of a provincial

myocardial infarction reperfusion strategy” in Prehospital and Disaster Medicine and “Treatment process differences with and without ambulance offload zone” in the Journal of Operational Research. Congratulations to all of the Division members (too many to name here!) involved in the publications for your excellent work.

This week marks an exciting milestone in New Brunswick. On Wednesday, the New Brunswick Emergency Medicine Clinical Academic Group (NB EMCAG) with representatives from across the province will hold its first meeting. This is unprecedented collaborative opportunity to leverage their collective expertise to improve emergency care in the province. The Dalhousie Department of Emergency Medicine is privileged to be included in this group and I look forward to the opportunities this presents.

As always, if you have any comments, suggestions or news you would like me to share, I can be reached at emergency.medicine@dal.ca.

Cheers, Kirk