

Last updated: 16:00 (GMT+04) Wednesday, July 23, 2008. Rajab 20, 1429.

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## BUSINESS

COMMENT AND ANALYSIS

## Fast track to post trauma recovery

By Carole Spiers, Special to Gulf News  
Published: March 27, 2008, 00:17

Just the other week, I warned in this column of the need for self-restraint on the road, and quoted my acronym of good driving habits: S.A.F.E. (Sure, Accepting, Focused, Ego-free)

But I certainly did not expect to find myself writing on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) following the UAE's worst-ever road accident, on March 11, with 347 injured, in a 200-car pile-up on the Abu Dhabi-Dubai highway.

The horrific incident at Al Ghantoot confirms the need for drivers to be ego-free and constantly aware of road conditions.

Sadly, road accidents are an increasing phenomenon on our densely packed roads, and the resulting Post Traumatic Stress is another. Many of those 300 injured, and many more who witnessed the horror, are going to need post-trauma counselling and long-term monitoring for the often delayed shock and after-effects.

Many of the people involved were groups of workers travelling to their construction sites, so there will be a communal reaction as well as many different private ones - almost as though it had been a major accident on site. This will inevitably cause a change of atmosphere at work.

Then there will be the official Inquiry, which can set up a good deal of emotional triggers. Re-living the incident can also bring on recurring nightmares and having to recount the events in front of the authorities can be highly stressful.

Longer-term, many of those involved will encounter Survivor Guilt, where witnesses blame themselves for their lucky escape, as though somehow the accident was their fault. ('It should have been me'.)

Post trauma counsellors/debriefers have developed ways to defuse these reactions by a Trauma Support procedure, by which the crisis intervener helps the sufferer to put the traumatic event into perspective and see that their reactions are 'normal' but it is the event that is 'abnormal.'

In the case of a collective trauma like this, there is also the opportunity for Co-counselling, where fellow-sufferers can discuss their feelings with others in the same position (peer group support).

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An human resource professional or business manager with specialist crisis intervention training will be able to recognise symptoms quickly and classify victims in terms of the most suitable therapy/support. The advantage of a fully trained trauma team in an organisation who are able to move straight into a Crisis Intervention and PTSD-handling routine is obvious.

Lessons may hopefully come out of the Al Ghantoot tragedy, including the need for a higher priority to be placed on the training of human resource and other personnel in post-incident support, and the sourcing of external specialist advice, both long and short-term. The next traumatic incident may not be another Al Ghantoot. But the effects will be the same ones. And so will the solutions.

#### Key points: Getting back up

- Re-living the incident will be stressful, especially during the inquiry.
- Fellow-sufferers can exchange impressions, or 'co-counsel'.
- Management and human resource professionals need to be trained to respond instantly to an incident.

*The writer is a BBC broadcaster and motivational speaker, with 20 years' of experience as CEO of Carole Spiers Group, an international stress consultancy based in London.*

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