Treating trauma survivors without re-traumatization is focus of new book

TORONTO, ON, Nov. 10, 2014 — With an estimated 67 per cent of people having experienced some form of trauma in their lifetime, a new book is giving healthcare professionals the information and tools they need to prevent re-traumatization when caring for survivors of trauma.

“Trauma survivors are overrepresented in our healthcare system,” says Catherine Classen, PhD, a psychologist at Women’s College Hospital and co-author of a new book titled, Treating the Trauma Survivor: An Essential Guide to Trauma-informed Care. “Yet many healthcare professionals are ill-equipped to ensure survivors feel safe and are not re-traumatized in their interactions with the healthcare system.”

In the book to be released Thursday, Classen and coauthors Carrie Clark, Anne Fourt and Maithili Shetty, give healthcare and social service professionals practical tools and strategies to care for trauma survivors and reduce the potential for re-traumatization.

Trauma may include everything from surviving a natural disaster or a car accident to sexual assault as an adult to recurrent physical or sexual abuse and emotional neglect in childhood. Research shows the more trauma an individual experiences, especially during childhood, the greater the likelihood of developing chronic disease, reproductive health problems, sexual behavior issues and mental health problems, the authors say.

“Re-traumatization of survivors is common in our healthcare system,” says Clark, a psychologist at Women’s College Hospital. “The survivor’s sense of safety can easily be compromised in simple interactions that are routine in the healthcare system. Without knowledge of an individual’s history, something simple like not listening or validating a person’s concerns can bring back memories of a traumatic event.”

Being collaborative, explaining the process, and giving individuals choice are just some of the strategies that can help alleviate concerns, the authors explain in the book. These are principles that should be standard practice, they add.

“Just as we learned to wash our hands to avoid germs and the spread of germs, we should apply these basic principles when caring for everyone,” Classen says. “In this way, without knowing someone’s history, we can reduce the likelihood of re-traumatizing survivors.”

A book launch for Treating the Trauma Survivor: An Essential Guide to Trauma-informed Care will take
place Thursday, Nov. 13 at Caversham Booksellers, 98 Harbord St, Toronto, ON from 7 to 9 pm.

For a copy of the book, visit Amazon.ca or Caversham Booksellers.

-Women’s College Hospital (www.womenscollegehospital.ca) is advancing the health of women and improving healthcare options for all by delivering innovative models of ambulatory care. Fully affiliated with the University of Toronto, the hospital is Canada’s leading academic, ambulatory hospital and a world leader in women’s health. With more than 800 physicians, nurses and health professionals, the hospital offers a range of specialized clinics and programs that are bridging the gaps in the health system. Women’s College Hospital is helping to keep people out of hospital by being at the forefront of cutting-edge research, diagnosis and treatment that will help prevent illness and enable patients to manage their health conditions. This healthcare enables Canadians to live healthier, more independent lives. At the Women’s College Research Institute, scientists combine science and patient care to develop innovative solutions to today’s greatest health challenges.

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