Understanding & Overcoming Compassion Fatigue

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Understanding & Overcoming Compassion Fatigue

Objectives for today’s webinar:

- Define Compassion Fatigue, Burnout & Vicarious Trauma
- Recognize warning signs for Compassion Fatigue
- Prevent/reduce the likelihood of suffering from Compassion Fatigue, Burnout & Vicarious Trauma
- Identify tools to handle situations that put you at risk for Compassion Fatigue
A Reflection on our Compassion

"The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen."

- Elisabeth Kübler-Ross
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- **Compassion Satisfaction**

  - Pleasure and satisfaction derived from working in helping, care giving systems
    - Knowing you were “there for someone” in need
    - Seeing a transformation in a patient/family
    - Pride in working with others who care

  **This is what likely brought each of us into this work**
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Compassion Fatigue

- A form of burnout that manifests itself as physical, emotional and spiritual exhaustion
- “An inability or reduced capacity to feel and convey genuine understanding, empathy and support”
  --Dr Paul B. Hofmann
- Has been described as:
  - “being sucked into a vortex that pulls them slowly downward”
  - “having nothing left to give”
  - “an occupational hazard”
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- **Burnout**
  - A term that originated in the business world
  - Refers to the physical and emotional exhaustion that comes from prolonged stress and frustration
    - Too many demands & not enough resources
  - Can happen in any field & often job related more than compassion related
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Vicarious Trauma

- Continuous exposure to other people’s trauma

- Can include intrusive imagery – images of other’s trauma popping into your head

- If you have personally suffered trauma, vicarious trauma can re-trigger your personal trauma

- Can trigger post traumatic stress symptoms

- Can lead to Compassion Fatigue
Vicarious Trauma (VT) can lead to Compassion Fatigue (CF)

Compassion Fatigue (CF) & Burnout both involve an erosion of emotional, physical & spiritual well being

CF is related to the compassionate & empathetic nature of our work; while Burnout is more related to the nature of our workplace

Burnout may be resolved by a change of job however not the case for CF
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Recognizing Warning Signs of CF

- Difficulty concentrating
- Intrusive imagery (related to VT)
- Feeling discouraged about the world
- Hopelessness
- Exhaustion
- Irritability
- High attrition
- Negative workplace outcomes
  - Poor morale, cynical workers remaining in the field, boundary violations, “toxic work environment”
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Other contributing factors in CF

- **Individual – personal stressors**
  - Life circumstance
  - Your history
  - Your coping style
  - Your personality

- **Situational – workplace stressors**
  - Caring for underserved populations
  - Stressful work environment
  - Exposure to strong feelings on daily basis

- **Food for thought:**
  - What are factors specific to your lives and workplaces?
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- Preventing/Reducing Likelihood of CF

  - CF is a process over time – early recognition can help
  
  - Some CF is unavoidable given the nature of our work
  
  - Put your health & wellness on your list of priorities
  
  - Consider the following Do’s and Don’t’s
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**Do**

- Talk to someone
  - spouse, close friend, trusted colleague
- Realize feelings are normal
- Sleep enough
- Take time off
  - work/life balance – plan vacations
- Develop hobbies
- Identify what is important to you
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Don’t

- Blame others
- Make important decisions when fatigued
- Work harder & longer
- Neglect your needs (physical, emotional, spiritual)
- Develop habit of complaining
- Self-medicate
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Self Care – Institution level

- Promote work/life balance
- Appreciate & recognize compassion when you observe it
- Lend a listening ear
- Acknowledge/debrief difficult case
So...

what can we do when our circuits are overloaded?
My Self Care Plan
Developing your Self Care Plan

- Quiet time alone – mindfulness meditation
- Daily practices for wellness
- Committing to eating better
- Regular physical activity
  - exercise, dance, gardening, playing with kids
- Talk with family/close friends
  - Take time for connected meaningful conversation
Self Care Plan

What are other ways that each of you

“recharge your battery??”
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Summary

- Goal = Compassion Satisfaction
- Catch the early warning signs of CF
- Utilize self care techniques

... Compassion Fatigue will occur ... it's how we handle it that matters
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Resources

- www.compassionfatigue.org
- Compassion Satisfaction: 50 Steps to Healthy Caregiving by Patricia Smith
- Professional Quality of Life website
  - www.proqol.org
- Nat’l Association of Social Workers
  - www.socialworkers.org
- Search “Compassion Fatigue”
“The capacity to care is the thing which gives life its deepest meaning and significance.”
- Pablo Casals