Compassion is the antidote:
Identifying and addressing causes of health professionals’ distress and fatigue

Stephen Parkinson
Psychotherapist
PPC Ed Forum

“We are all a family” Experiences of staff working in children’s blood and cancer centres in New Zealand Gemma Aburn (May 2021)

Resiliency and team connections

“I need a friend”: the long journey. Karyn Bycroft (June 2021)

Compassionate practice and Companioning
Part 1 – Health professionals’ distress and fatigue
3 out of 5 NZ nurses fit the criteria for burn-out

Compassion fatigue is an expected and common response in PPC

Rourke (2007)
Health system

- Under staffed
- Under resourced
- Poorly paid
Nurses may leave the profession because they experience poor job satisfaction, and feelings of spiritual emptiness which resulted from compassion fatigue

Harris & Griffin, (2015)
Counsellors who are burned out have less energy to manage compassion stress and are consequently more vulnerable to secondary traumatic stress

Temitope & Williams (2015)
Caring Fatigue/Distress

Burnout
Compassion Fatigue
Secondary Traumatic Stress
Empathy Fatigue
Emotional Fatigue
Spiritual Fatigue
Moral Distress
We need to recognise the cause of the fatigue/stress in order to effectively address it.
Burn-out

A syndrome resulting from chronic work stress that has not been successfully managed

WHO (2019)
Compassion fatigue

Emotional and physical exhaustion leading to a diminished ability to empathize or feel compassion for others, often described as the negative cost of caring

Figley (2002)
Secondary Traumatic Stress

The emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the first-hand trauma experiences of another (Witnesses or is aware of the suffering of another)

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)
Empathy Fatigue

Empathy fatigue is the emotional and physical exhaustion that happens from caring for people day, after day, after day

Albers (2020)
Moral Distress

Moral distress arises when one knows the right thing to do, but institutional constraints make it nearly impossible to pursue the right course of action

A. Jameton (1984)
Moral Distress: Internal constraints

- Lack of assertiveness
- Self-doubt
- Being socialized to follow orders
- Perceived powerlessness
- Incomplete understanding of the situation
Moral Distress: Clinical Causes

- Continuing life support when not in the patient’s best interest
- Initiating lifesaving actions that merely prolong dying
- Inappropriate use of resources
- Inadequate staffing or inadequately trained staff
- Inadequate communication about end-of-life care
- Following family’s wishes out of fear of litigation
- Providing inadequate pain relief
- Providing false hope to patients and families
# Common Symptoms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Emotional</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lowered Concentration</td>
<td>Guilt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apathy</td>
<td>Anger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rigid thinking</td>
<td>Numbness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perfectionism</td>
<td>Sadness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preoccupation with trauma</td>
<td>Helplessness</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Behavioral</th>
<th>Physical</th>
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<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>Increased heart rate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sleep disturbance</td>
<td>Difficulty breathing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appetite change</td>
<td>Muscle and joint pain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hyper-vigilance</td>
<td>Impaired immune system</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elevated startle response</td>
<td>Increased severity of medical concerns</td>
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Fatigue - Satisfaction

The experience of compassion fatigue is an expected and common response to the professional task of routinely caring for children at the end of life ... any consideration of the toll ... must be balanced with a consideration of the parallel experience of compassion satisfaction

Rourke (2007) Compassion Fatigue in Pediatric Palliative Care Providers
Vygotsky

- **Comfort zone**: Routine work
  Challenge: too low

- **Flow, “the zone”**: Purposeful practice
  Challenge: suitably high

- **Zone of Proximal Development**: Deliberate practice with a teacher
  Challenge: suitably high

- **Impossible zone**: Challenge: too high
GOLDILOCKS PRINCIPLE

GOLDILOCKS ZONE

MOTIVATION

BOR EDOM

DIFFICULTY

FAILURE

TRUE COLOURS CHILDREN’S HEALTH TRUST
Self reflection time

• How do I hold the dissonance between my ideal and reality of work life?
• How is my resiliency, my coping skills?
• Is my training/experience appropriate?
• How healthy is the organisation/management?
Dissonance between ideal and reality

Are my expectations of myself and of the workplace realistic?
How is my self-care?
How are my boundaries?
Does this work (PPC) sit well with my sense of purpose and satisfaction?
Resiliency and coping skills

Have I struggled with stress or ‘burn out’ in the past?
Are there personal issues causing me stress or that trigger me at work?
Do I have good support systems in and out of work?
Do I practice good self care?
Am I being honest with myself about my capacity?
Training and experience

• Do I have appropriate training for this work?
• Do I have sufficient experience?
• Would I benefit from mentoring/supervision?
• Can I develop collegial support?
Organisation/management

• Do I consider the team to be mostly healthy in its functioning?
• Is there adequate staffing?
• Do I respect my manager/leader?
• Is my work valued?
• Do we engage in peer support/training/team building?
• Is it acceptable and encouraged to seek support?
Managing Moral Distress in the Workplace: Creating a Resiliency Bundle

Top methods to reduce burnout include debriefing, 1-on-1 conversations with peers, and social activities outside of work.

Areas that staff find especially valuable outside the workplace include exercise, faith, and family. A multitude of options are necessary to meet individual’s needs and expectations.

Davis & Batcheller (2020)
‘The Work Family’
Aburn, Hoare & Gott (2021)

• Finding attachment
  Being new in the team
  Being supported and nurtured
  Social connectedness

• Becoming a work family
  Being a team
  Having core work family values
  Sharing success and burden

• Having an identity
  Being special
  Making a difference
  Being valued
Elasticity

Stepping up at times of need is healthy... it’s when we don’t or can’t ease back to ‘normal’ work expectations that we get in trouble
Part 2
Compassion is the antidote to fatigue

• Neuroscience – Compassion does not cause fatigue
• fMRI’s show Empathic Distress Fatigue (EDF) happens when the ‘self-other’ distinction is blurred
• EDF should replace Compassion Fatigue as a more accurate term
• Klimecki & Singer (2012)
Emotion Regulation

Without emotion regulation skills, our ‘self-other’ distinction is blurred so we absorb another’s pain and negative emotions and suffer *empathic distress fatigue*

Singer & Klimecki (2014)

Psychodynamics: Counter transference
The distinction between empathy and compassion matters because the alleviating strategy for ‘empathic distress fatigue’ is compassion training

Hofmeyer et al (2020)
Empathy

Empathy is the ability to ‘feel with’ others while recognising that the emotions we experience are external to oneself, and are initiated by the other person.

Empathy is essential for understanding others’ emotions.

Klimecki (2015)
Compassion

Compassion is ‘feeling for’ others who are in pain with warmth, empathic concern, capacity to understand their perspective and intentions, and having prosocial behaviours such as the motivation to act with compassion to relieve their pain

Klimecki (2015)
Compassion entails “our ability to recognise the suffering of another without taking on that suffering as our own, combined with an authentic desire to alleviate the suffering of another”

Diana Tikasz (2018)
The Cost of Caring, the Rewards of Resilience:
Creating An Organizational Culture of Compassion and Wellbeing
‘Even though there can be “empathy fatigue,” there cannot be “compassion fatigue,” since compassion is essentially a wholesome, positive state of mind, while empathy is only the tool that allows one to correctly perceive the state of mind of others’.

Matthieu Ricard (2009)
It is vital to regulate our emotions when empathising so we don’t hinder our ability to care or risk our personal wellbeing.
4 Strategies

• Compassion
• Self-care practices
• Self-compassion
• Compassion leadership

Hofmeyer, Kennedy & Taylor (2019)
Mindfulness

Just breathe...

MINDFULNESS FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS
Loving Kindness Meditation

May you be filled with loving kindness
May you be well
May you be peaceful and at ease
May you be happy
GOD GRANT ME THE

SERENITY

TO ACCEPT THE THINGS I CANNOT CHANGE

COURAGE

TO CHANGE THE THINGS I CAN

WISDOM

TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE
Companioning
Alan Wolfelt (2005)

Companioning is about being present to another person’s pain; it is not about taking away the pain.

Companioning is about learning from others; it is not about teaching them.

Companioning is about compassionate curiosity; it is not about expertise.

Companioning is about being still; it is not about frantic movement forward.
Self-care:
An activity that supports, energises, soothes or inspires

SELF-CARE WHEEL

- Relaxation/Stress Relief
- Sleep
- Diet
- Exercise/Health
- Spirituality
- Social Support
- Substance Use
BE KIND to Yourself
by KRISTIN NEFF

1. SELF KINDNESS
   - We are as caring toward ourselves as we are toward others.

2. RECOGNIZING OUR COMMON HUMANITY
   - Shared human experience
   - Moment of connection with others
   - Pain

3. MINDFULNESS
   - Being open to the reality of the present moment
   - Acknowledge our suffering without exaggerating it
   - You are here

A HAPPY LIFE

SELF-COMPASSION
A SOURCE OF STRENGTH AND RESILIENCE

RESEARCH AND MORE RESEARCH
SELF-COMPASSION
Compassionate leadership

• Develop a culture of care
• Role model compassion
• Provide training opportunities
• Promote wellness practices
Feeling supported, heard and cared about by colleagues is a crucial skill to maintain resiliency and to combat Compassion Fatigue

Summary

1- To address your stress/fatigue, accurately identity the reason for it

2- Compassion practice is an antidote to Empathy Distress Fatigue
Final reflections

• Remember what first drew you to this work
• What is one thing you can do to enhance your work satisfaction?
• What is one supportive thing you might do or say to a colleague?
• Practice compassion to self and others
“Being still and doing nothing are two completely different things.” – Jackie Chan
References


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• Hofmeyer, A., Kennedy, K., Taylor, R. (2020) Contesting the term ‘compassion fatigue’: Integrating findings from social neuroscience and self-care research. Collegian, 27, p 232-


• https://www.aacn.org/clinical-resources/moral-distress


• https://info-buddhism.com/Empathy-Compassion-Neuroscience-Ricard-Altruism.html
