Compassion Fatigue
Learning Points

• What is compassion fatigue?
• How do you recognize if you have it? Signs and symptoms.
• How do you get better and continue to get better?
• The difference between compassion fatigue and burnout
• Who is at risk?
• Case study
• Validation
What is it?

• Compassion fatigue is an extreme state of tension and can create secondary traumatic stress for the one helping the people or person in distress or trauma
• First diagnosed in the 1950’s
• Compassion fatigue effects individuals both personally and professionally – sometimes both!
Compassion fatigue, also known as secondary traumatic stress (STS), is a condition characterized by a gradual lessening of compassion over time. It is common among individuals that work directly with trauma victims such as, therapists (paid and unpaid) nurses, psychologists, first responders, health unit coordinators and anyone who helps out others.
How Do You Recognize if You Have It?

Compassion fatigue symptoms are similar to someone who is suffering from chronic stress

• Common Symptoms:
  • Isolation
  • Sad
  • Checked out of life and what's going on with others around them
  • Irritation
  • Poor or no self-care
  • Overeat, overspend, addictions
  • Thoughts, flashbacks, nightmares of the persons traumatic experience
  • Exhaustion… both mentally and physically
  • Health issues: colds, digestion problems, lowered immune system
Apathy, isolation, bottled up emotions and substance abuse head a long list of symptoms associated with the secondary traumatic stress disorder now labeled: Compassion Fatigue”

-www.compassionfatigue.org
At Work - What to Watch Out For in Yourself

Organizational signs and symptoms can include:

• Absenteeism
• Inability to work well with others and or having a hard time getting along with your team
• Aggressive behaviors at work and towards your coworkers
• Difficulty completing your work and assignments, hard time meeting deadlines
• Negative attitude
• Laziness
• Not willing or open to change
Who is At Risk?

• Any individual that work directly with trauma victims either professionally or on a personal level (example would be a caregiver for a family member)
The Difference Between Compassion Fatigue and Burnout? Similar Yet Different

### Compassion Fatigue

- Happens due to the cost of caring for others
- Emotional and physical pain due to the trauma of others that effects us
- Thoughts of the trauma or experience can last a long time and flashbacks can stay with us for a lifetime if nothing is done

### Burnout

- Physical and emotional exhaustion
- Does not mean our view of the world is bad or damaged
- Can be more easy to fixed by a change of environment.. example: job change
Case Study

As an ER nurse, you are in the first hour of your shift and a child is brought in that has been in a car accident. The patient is 5 years old and in horrible shape and distress. Everyone rushes to prepare the trauma room.

As the child is being rushed in and lifted onto the table he is pronounced dead by the lead doctor. Now, the rest of your shift will be spent helping to console and assist the family members as they file in to the waiting area one by one. It is all hands on deck to help the family get through this night.
How Do You Get Better and Continue To Get Better?

• First step in the journey is AWARENESS… you need to be aware and acknowledge that the symptoms are effecting your day to day life in a negative way
  – Education on the issue can always help with awareness

• Best way to recognize this is to check in with yourself on a daily basis… ask yourself questions:
  – How am I doing? How am I feeling? How is my emotional well being? How is my energy level?

• Be sure to look out for the signs and symptoms addressed on the previous slides

• Be kind to yourself

• Make the commitment to yourself: you have to want to get better
  – Seek help
  – Surround yourself with positive support outside of the help you are giving others
Validation

• It is important to validate your experiences and what you are feeling
  – Are you feeling sick day-to-day because you don’t know what you are going to experience next?
  – Be mindful… what does it do to your body? To your mind?

• We have to remember that sometimes caring too much about others can hurt us in the long run

• We have to be aware of putting too much focus on others without having self care for OUR overall wellness… remember if you don’t care for yourself you will burn out and not be able to care for others
Resources

• Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project - www.compassionfatigue.org
• Healthy Caregiving - www.healthycaregiving.com
• Book: Compassion Satisfaction by Patricia Smith
• Article link: http://adrenalfatiguesolution.com/caregiver-stress
  By Fawne Hansen
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http://www.worklife4you.com

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