Preventing Compassion Fatigue and Burnout

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Objectives

• Recognize signs and symptoms of compassion fatigue and burnout
• Understand mitigating factors and strategies proven to prevent both compassion fatigue and burnout
• Develop an understanding of self-care including self-awareness, self-reflection and mindfulness meditation
• Understand why self-care benefits HCP and our patients
The practice of medicine is:
  an art, not a trade;
  a calling not a business;
  a calling in which your heart will be exercised equally with your head.

-Sir William Osler
Compassion Fatigue

- “the cost of caring”
- Secondary or vicarious traumatization
- Symptoms parallel to PTSD
  - Hyperarousal
  - Avoidance
  - Reexperiencing

Kearney et al
Vicarious Traumatization

- A stress reaction experienced by [HCP] who are exposed to disclosures of traumatic stories by [patients], in which [HCP] experience enduring changes in the manner in which they view self, others and the world.
Vicarious Traumatization

• Long-term, inevitable, expectable consequence of working with suffering people
• Leads to:
  ▫ A transformation of the system of meaning in the sufferer
  ▫ A darkening of one’s worldview, spirituality and relationships
Most Common Signs

- Increased rate of illnesses
- Cynicism
- Sadness
- Intolerance of emotion
- Addictive responses
- Exhaustion
- Depression
- Loss of efficiency
- Judgement errors
Impact of Compassion Fatigue on Patient Care

- Iatrogenic suffering
- Team dynamics
- Boundary issues
Burnout

- Emotional exhaustion
- Reduced personal accomplishment and commitment to the profession
- Depersonalization
  - A negative attitude towards patients
  - Personal detachment
  - Loss of ideals
Symptoms and Signs of Burnout

- Individual
  - Overwhelming physical and emotional exhaustion
  - Feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job
  - A sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment
  - Overidentification or overinvolvement
  - Irritability and hypervigilance
  - Sleep problems, including nightmares
  - Social withdrawal
  - Professional and personal boundary violations
  - Poor judgment
Symptoms and Signs of Burnout

- Individual
  - Perfectionism and rigidity
  - Questioning the meaning of life
  - Questioning prior religious beliefs
  - Interpersonal conflicts
  - Avoidance of emotionally difficult clinical situations
  - Addictive behaviors
  - Numbness and detachment
  - Difficulty in concentrating
  - Frequent illness—headaches, gastrointestinal disturbances, immune system impairment
Symptoms and Signs of Burnout

- **Team**
  - Low morale
  - High job turnover
  - Impaired job performance (decreased empathy, increased absenteeism)
  - Staff conflicts
Work Environment Stressors

- Constant exposure to death and suffering
- Inadequate time with patients
- Growing workload and increasing numbers of deaths
- Inadequate coping with one’s own emotional response to dying and suffering patients
- The need to carry on “as usual” in the wake of patients’ deaths
- Communication difficulties (patients and families)
- Identification with patients
- Inability to live up to one’s own standards
- Feelings of depression, grief and guilt in response to loss

Kearney et al
How can we mitigate burnout?

- Mindfulness Meditation
- Reflective Writing
- Adequate supervision and mentoring
- Sustainable workload
- Promotion of feelings of choice and control
- Appropriate recognition and reward
- Supportive work community
- Promotion of fairness and justice in the workplace
More strategies...

- Training in communication skills
- Development of self-awareness skills
- Practice of self-care activities
- Continuing educational activities
- Participation in research
- Developing a grateful outlook
- Web-based self-help interventions
- Use of ritual
- Mindfulness-based stress reduction for team
- Meaning-centered intervention for team
Summary

- Self-awareness
- Self-reflection
- Self-care
- Education
- Support
Mindfulness Meditation

• What is it?
• What can it do for us?
• How does it work?
• How do we practice?
What is mindfulness meditation?

• “Mindfulness is a conscious moment-to-moment awareness, cultivated by systematically paying attention on purpose in a particular way”

Kabat-Zinn, 1996
Mindfulness Meditation

- It teaches the clinician to develop a “kind, objective witnessing attitude” toward himself or herself and helps to develop empathy for others.
Practice

- Pause
- Notice where your mind is resting
- Notice your breath
- Notice your body
Benefits of Meditation

Physiological:
- Engages **neuroplasticity** in several regions of the brain altering brain structure (including thicker gray matter) and function
- Increase activation in brain regions associated with positive affect
- Lower activation in amygdala
- Increase activity in insula & the physiological responses of emotions

Davidson, 2003
Benefits of Meditation

Physiological:
• Improved cognitive & attention skills ... associated increase in alpha-wave patterns & decrease in delta-wave patterns
• Fosters ability to voluntarily regulate flow of spontaneous mental activity ... free mind from distractions
• Improved immune function

Davidson, 2003
Benefits of Meditation

Psychological:
• Increase positive affect
• Decrease in emotional reactivity & increase in voluntary self-regulation of emotion
• Increase in ability to perceive emotional & mental state of self and other ... sensitivity, empathy, compassion toward self and other
• Provides powerful cognitive-behaviour coping tools ... with focus on altering cognitive processes rather than changing content

Davidson, 2003
Benefits of Meditation

Psychological:

- Fosters “cognitive flexibility” and “a fundamental shift in one’s perspective” ... choosing a response rather than reacting to a situation
- Cultivates capacity for self-regulation ... positive changes in both physical & psychological health
- Effective in reducing stress, depression & anxiety
- Enhances skills for interpersonal relationships

Davidson, 2003
Benefits of Personal Practice

- Cultivation of cognitive & physiological capabilities that support overall **well-being, resilience** and **productivity**

- Develops five key attributes in preventing and treating burnout and compassion fatigue:
  1) compassion and self-compassion
  2) resilience
  3) self-awareness
  4) metacognition and attention
  5) meaning

Duerr, 2009
Isn’t Self-care Selfish?
Benefits to Patients

- Patients receive improved care from care providers who have developed greater skills in self-care and self-awareness. (M. Duerr, 2009)
- Qualities developed by mindfulness practice are essential to good care & wise decision-making
  - Critical, yet non-judgmental, self-reflection
  - Deep listening
  - Ability to be Present, moment-to-moment (Epstein, 1999; Connelly, 1999 & 2005)
More evidence...

- Mindfulness has two distinct but intimately related goals that are at the heart of good medical practice:
  - the promotion of well-being among health care workers and
  - the facilitation of healing in patients.

- Clinical experience suggests that health care practitioners facilitate healing by being open, accepting, and focused in the present moment.

- Mindfulness training helps us practice this way of being

Hutchinson and Dobkin (2009)
...there is a catch

- In order to be effective, mindfulness requires regular practice
The Stress Reaction Cycle

Kabat-Zinn, 1996
Coping with Stress: Responding vs. Reacting

Kabat-Zinn, 1996
Between stimulus and response there is a space.

In that space is our power to choose our response.

In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

-Viktor Frankl
Attention

- Natural capacity for all of us
- Our most valuable inner resource
- The root of our capacity to learn and relate to our self and others
- Nothing reaches consciousness without attention
Attention

• The quality of our attention is generally weak and underdeveloped

• Can be cultivated and trained

• Has the potential to change your brain and foster well-being psychologically and physiologically

Kabat-Zinn, 1996
Practice

- Pause
- Notice where your mind is resting
- Notice your breath
- Notice your body
The % of time our mind is concerning itself with and focused on the

Past – Present – Future
The % of time our mind is concerning itself with and focused on the

Past – Present – Future

40-10-50
**How to Practice**

**Formal**
- bring attention to chosen focus
- notice when distracted
- return to chosen focus
- with a gentle, kind, non-judgmental understanding and matter of factness ...

**Informal**
- same quality of attending
- directed to mundane events and experiences of everyday life
- pay attention to what you are doing as you are doing it and being fully aware of that experience

Usual objects of attention are breath and walking
Attitudinal Foundation of Mindfulness Practice

- Non-judgement
- Patience
- Beginner’s Mind
- Trust
- Non-striving
- Acceptance
- Letting Go

Kabat-Zinn, 1996
Mind Full, or Mindful?
References


References

Getting started with meditation...

- Center for Mindfulness
  - [http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/](http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/)
- Full Catastrophe Living – Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD
  - Guided meditations on CD
- The Iris Center in Fredericton
- Silent Retreat
- Mindfulness Mondays