The Emotional Bind of Compassionate Caregiving

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Objectives

- Discuss the emotional impact of caregiving
- Understand the concept of **Compassion Fatigue** and ideas for managing it
The Emotional Bind of Compassionate Care

- How do you effectively manage the heavy emotional labor of your work while preserving emotional balance and professionalism?
What happens when we are “chronic caregivers”?

- Lots of automatic physical responses, feelings, and thoughts!

- These reactions often need to be controlled or suppressed in the service of “good caregiving”
  - Rather than processed or allowed to naturally extinguish
What are the effects of being exposed to others’ trauma?

- Sometimes not too different from direct trauma
  - Unwanted thoughts, nightmares, “flashbacks,” physical distress
  - Avoiding reminders
  - Feeling unsafe, insomnia, difficulty concentrating, irritability
Compassion Fatigue

- Stress resulting from sharing in stories of or witnessing distress of others you are trying to help
  - “A disorder that affects even those who are doing their work very well.”

- Can begin to challenge basic beliefs about safety, trust, control, etc.

- Ebbs and flows, but even very healthy individuals with good life/work balance may experience it
Symptoms and Impact of Compassion Fatigue
Emotional Indicators

- Anxiety, negative hyperarousal
- Intrusive imagery
- Numbness, flooding
- Lowered frustration tolerance, irritability
- Grief
- Anger
Physical Indicators

- Headaches, GI symptoms
- Insomnia, nightmares, sleep disruptions
- Decreased immune response
- Fatigue, lethargy
- Concentration difficulties
- Increased accident-proneness
Personal Indicators

- Decrease in subjective sense of safety
- Self-isolation
- Difficulty separating work life from personal life
- Diminished functioning in non-professional circumstances
- Increases in ineffective or self-destructive self-soothing behaviors
Work Indicators

- Avoidance of certain patients
- Hypervigilant response to certain cases
- Diminished sense of purpose, enjoyment
- Feeling ineffective
- Feeling disorganized, unmotivated
- Boundary problems
- Cynicism, blaming others
# Compassion Fatigue Symptoms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Behavioral</th>
<th>Spiritual</th>
<th>Personal Relationships</th>
<th>Physical/Somatic</th>
<th>Work Performance</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lowered Concentration</td>
<td>Powerlessness</td>
<td>Impatient</td>
<td>Questioning the meaning of life</td>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>Rapid heartbeat</td>
<td>Low motivation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decreased self-esteem</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Irritable</td>
<td>Loss of purpose</td>
<td>Decreased interest in intimacy or sex</td>
<td>Breathing difficulties</td>
<td>Avoiding tasks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apathy</td>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td>Withdrawn</td>
<td>Lack of self satisfaction</td>
<td>Mistrust</td>
<td>Fatigue</td>
<td>Obsession about details</td>
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<td>Rigidity</td>
<td>Anger/rage</td>
<td>Moody</td>
<td>Pervasive hopelessness</td>
<td>Isolation from others</td>
<td>GI symptoms</td>
<td>Apathy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disorientation</td>
<td>Survivor guilt</td>
<td>Sleep disturbance</td>
<td>Anger at God</td>
<td>Over protection as a parent</td>
<td>Aches and pains</td>
<td>Negativity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perfectionism</td>
<td>Shutdown</td>
<td>Nightmares</td>
<td>Questioning of prior religious beliefs</td>
<td>Projection of anger or blame</td>
<td>Dizziness</td>
<td>Boundary problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minimization</td>
<td>Numbness</td>
<td>Appetite changes</td>
<td>Loss of faith in a higher power</td>
<td>Intolerance</td>
<td>Increased number and intensity of medical maladies</td>
<td>Poor work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preoccupation with trauma</td>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Hyper-vigilant</td>
<td>Greater skepticism re: religion</td>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>Impaired immune System</td>
<td>Absenteeism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distorted Cognitions</td>
<td>Helplessness</td>
<td>Emotional roller coaster</td>
<td>Increased interpersonal Conflicts</td>
<td>Impaired</td>
<td>Exhaustion</td>
<td>Withdrawal from Colleagues</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>Emotional roller coaster</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accident proneness</td>
<td>Losing Things</td>
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<td>Depleted</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Overly sensitive</td>
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Tips for Preventing/Lessening Compassion Fatigue
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- **Sustainable self-care**
  - Not just sleep and nutrition and exercise -- it’s how you **prioritize yourself**
  - Talk with others who are good models
  - Think back to things that brought you joy in childhood
Tips for Preventing/Lessening Compassion Fatigue

- Balanced workload with small bits of time for yourself each day

- Ask for help
  - Don’t wait for others to read your mind
  - Who could/would step in if you needed to be idle?
Tips for Preventing/Lessening Compassion Fatigue

- Mindful transitions from work to home
  - Be purposeful about ritual – changing clothes, walking, music, etc.

- Limit trauma inputs
Tips for Preventing/Lessening Compassion Fatigue

- Say no (or yes) more often
- Look for peer supervision and support
- Keep learning
Tips for Preventing/Lessening Compassion Fatigue

- Explore other (indirect care) duties
- Find small changes that are easy to make in activity level, nutrition, sleep, etc.

Stress Reduction Kit

Bang Head Here

Directions:
1. Place kit on FIRM surface.
2. Follow directions in circle of kit.
3. Repeat step 2 as necessary, or until unconscious.
4. If unconscious, cease stress reduction activity.
Final Thoughts

- Suppression = Short-Term Gain and Long-Term Pain

- Self-Awareness + Self-Care = Resilience

- Small Changes + Time = Big Results

- You don’t have to do it alone!
Final Thoughts

- Dig where the ground is soft.

~ Chinese proverb