Compassion Fatigue
From Awareness to Action

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LIFELEARN
ANIMAL HEALTH
Compassion Fatigue

What is it?
What it is not?
What makes us vulnerable?
What does it look like?
What are the consequences?
How do we manage it?
How do we treat it?
Compassion Fatigue

“The natural consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other – the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person.”

(Figley, Treating Compassion Fatigue, 2002)
Compassion Fatigue

“The deep physical, emotional, and spiritual exhaustion that can result from working day to day in an intense caregiving environment.”

(Figley & Roop, *Compassion fatigue in the animal-care community*, 2006)
Compassion Fatigue

Primary Traumatic Stress

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Cumulative Stress

CF

(Voges & Romney, 2003; Gentry, 2005)
Compassion Fatigue

Primary Traumatic Stress

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Cumulative Stress

CF

(Voges & Romney, 2003; Gentry, 2005)
Dealing with someone else’s trauma, pain, and loss

- Animals
- Public
- Colleagues

(Mathieu, *The Compassion Fatigue Workbook*, 2011)
Dealing with your own trauma, pain, and loss

- Death in the family (including the family pet)
- Separation/divorce
- Car accident
- Alcoholism/addictions
- Major disease diagnosis
- Mental illness
- Family violence

(Mathieu, *The Compassion Fatigue Workbook*, 2011)
Compassion Fatigue

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Secondary Traumatic Stress

CF

Cumulative Stress

(Voges & Romney, 2003; Gentry, 2005)
Cumulative Stress

Professional Stress

- Intense workplace demands and stress
- Unmet expectations
- Inability to achieve work-related goals
- Powerlessness
- Long hours
- Staff discord
- Boredom with routines

Personal Stress

- Intense family demands and stress
- Family conflict
- Personal health problems
- Financial concerns
- Housing difficulties
- Social isolation

(Mathieu, *The Compassion Fatigue Workbook*, 2011)
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Compassion Fatigue

- Exposure to Suffering
- Healthy Detachment
- Empathic Response
- Compassion Satisfaction
- Concern
- Compassion Stress
- Prolonged Exposure to Suffering
- Primary Traumatic Stress
- Cumulative Stress
- Compassion Fatigue

(Compassion Stress and Fatigue Model, Figley, 1995)
What is it not?

Awareness
Typical Work Week

Don't speak to me!!

God, get me through this day!

Sunday

Monday

Life is slowly seeping back into my body!

Anticipation!

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday
Burnout

“A psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a sense of low personal accomplishment.”

(Maslach et al, Maslach Burnout Inventory Manual, 1996)
Burnout

• Arises from work-related stress (excessive, prolonged, and unrelieved stress)

• Driven by organizational concerns, policies, procedures, and bureaucracy

• The consequence of a disconnection between the individual’s expectation around role performance and the organization’s structure to support the role

• A cumulative and sometimes unconscious process

• Treatable (but may require changing jobs/careers)

(Pines & Aronson, *Career Burnout*, 1988)
Compassion Fatigue

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Depression

“A common and serious medical illness that negatively affects how you feel, the way you think and how you act. It causes feelings of sadness and/or a loss of interest in activities, leads to a variety of emotional and physical problems, and can decrease a person’s ability to function at work and at home.”

(American Psychiatric Association, 2017)
“I hope I never lose my sense of wonder.”
What makes us vulnerable?

Awareness
Our Vulnerabilities

• We are compassionate people
• We are “animal lovers”
• We deal with issues of trauma (accidents, illness, disease, death, dying, loss, homelessness, abuse, and neglect)
• Our work is emotionally-demanding
• We work long hours
• We have hectic and changing schedules
Our Vulnerabilities

• We feel the pressure of rising public expectations
• We often operate with limited funds, with needs exceeding resources
• Animal care is economic-based
• We provide “basket-to-casket” health care
• We engage in euthanasia
What does it look like?

Awareness
**Symptoms**

**Intrusive Thoughts**
- Unwanted and unwelcomed memories and ruminations
- Flashbacks
- Nightmares

**Constrictive Efforts**
- Active efforts to avoid the thoughts, feelings, and activities that repeatedly remind you of the pain, suffering, and loss

**Hyperarousal**
- Sleep disturbances
- General anxiety
- Difficulty concentrating

- Exaggerated startle reaction
- Agitation and irritability
- Hypervigilance
Symptoms

- Reduced ability to feel sympathy and empathy
- Lethargy, physical and emotional exhaustion
- Somatization and hypochondria
- Skepticism, cynicism, embitterment, and resentfulness
- Mood swings, anxiety, irrational fears, depression, suicidal thoughts or gestures
- Anger and irritability
- Disrupted world view, negative self-image
- Hypersensitivity or insensitivity to emotional material
- Problems with intimacy and in personal relationships
- Increasing personal and professional isolation
- Increased use of alcohol and drugs

(Mathieu, *The Compassion Fatigue Workbook*, 2011)
Symptoms

- Memory loss, forgetfulness
- Loss of efficiency and reliability
- Impaired ability to make decisions, indecision, inappropriate judgement
- Unpredictable work habits and patterns
- Absenteeism – missing work, taking many sick days
- Sleeping difficulties
- Difficulty separating work life from personal life
- Diminished sense of enjoyment of career
- Dread of working with certain animals and people, and in certain situations
- Feeling professional helplessness

(Mathieu, *The Compassion Fatigue Workbook*, 2011)
What are the consequences?
Consequences

Physical and Mental Health

• Physical ailments such as headaches, gastrointestinal upsets, and chronic pain and fatigue

• Psychiatric conditions such as mood disorders (e.g. anxiety and depression), eating disorders, dissociative disorders, personality disorders, and addictions (e.g. smoking, alcohol, and gambling)

Professional Competence and Success

• Poor interpersonal relationships
• Compromised animal care

(Mathieu, *The Compassion Fatigue Workbook*, 2011)
Vocational Direction and Development

- Engage in premature job changes
- Drop out of animal welfare

“Compassion fatigue has driven both promising and seasoned professionals out of their professions entirely, permanently altering the direction of career paths.”

(Mathie, JAVMA, 2002)

Organizational Welfare

- Spreads “as a contagion” to pan-systemically – and detrimentally – affect hospital climate and outcomes

(Mathieu, The Compassion Fatigue Workbook, 2011)
How do we manage it?
Healthy Self Care

“Nourish your body, mind and spirit to sustain and maintain your personal and professional life.”

(Stoewen, *Compassion Fatigue* in *The First Bite*, 2006)
Healthy Self Care

- Take daily walks
- Embrace spirituality
- Maintain a healthy diet
- Practice relaxation techniques
- Exercise and participate in sports
- Interact with children and animals
- Pursue any passions you might have
- Get in touch with nature and the outdoors
- Volunteer and contribute to your community
- Schedule time to simply relax and read or play
- Cultivate interests, activities, and hobbies beyond work
Healthy Self Care

Tips

• Take stock “What’s on your plate?”
• Think of ways to take better care of yourself
• Find time for yourself every day – rebalance your workload
• Delegate - learn to ask for help at home and at work
• Have a transition from work to home
• Learn to say no (or yes) more often
• Assess and adjust your trauma inputs
• Consider working fewer hours

(Mathieu, Transforming Compassion Fatigue into Compassion Satisfaction, 2007)
Boundaries

- **Pity:** I acknowledge your suffering.
- **Sympathy:** I care about your suffering.
- **Empathy:** I feel your suffering.
- **Compassion:** I want to relieve your suffering.

**Engagement**
Boundaries

You

Other

(Klimecki & Singer, *Empathic distress fatigue*, 2011; Dowling, *Compassion does not fatigue!*, 2017)
Empathy is the first step in building social connection

The capacity to share the feelings of others
“Feeling with”

(Klimecki & Singer, *Empathic distress fatigue*, 2011; Dowling, *Compassion does not fatigue!*, 2017)
Boundaries

You \ Other

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“Feeling *with*”

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Hierarchy Model of Empathy and Compassion

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Hierarchy Model of Empathy and Compassion

Empathy

- Empathetic Concern
- Sympathy

Empathetic Distress

Other-related Emotion
- Positive Feelings
- Good Health
- Prosocial Motivation

Self-related Emotion
- Negative Feelings & Stress
- Poor health, Fatigue
- Withdrawal

(Klimecki & Singer, *Empathic distress fatigue*, 2011; Dowling, *Compassion does not fatigue!*, 2017)
“Whether observation of distress in others leads to empathic concern and altruistic motivation or to empathic distress and self-centered emotions depends upon our capacity for self-other differentiation.”

Don’t own other’s pain

Beware of boundary issues

• Maintain perspective surrounding your personal investment
• Remain connected with your own resources

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Stoewen, Compassion Fatigue in The First Bite, 2006)
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Don’t own other’s pain
Beware of boundary issues
  • Maintain perspective surrounding your personal investment
  • Remain connected with your own resources

Let go of things that cannot be controlled
Remember that you are who you are – not what you do

(Klimecki & Singer, Empathic distress fatigue, 2011
Stoewen, Compassion Fatigue in The First Bite, 2006)
Compassion

“Compassion is a skill that can be cultivated, and empathic distress can be reversed by learning how to turn empathy into compassion.”

Compassion Training

• Meditation-related techniques foster feelings of benevolence and kindness
• ‘loving kindness training’

(Singer & Klimecki, *Empathy and compassion*, 2014; Dowling, *Compassion does not fatigue!,* 2017)
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Healthy Relationships

“Intentionally affiliate with those who share your values, believe in you, and nurture your growth to enhance your well-being.”

(Stoewen, Compassion Fatigue in The First Bite, 2006)
Healthy Relationships

Affiliate with those who:

• Care about each other and show it
• Genuinely like one another
• Joke around and/or pitch in when needed
• Pick-up on even the most subtle mood changes of fellow workers and ask about them in a caring and supportive manner

(Figley & Roop, *Compassion Fatigue in the Animal-Care Community*, 2006; Stoewen, *Compassion Fatigue in The First Bite*, 2006)
Healthy Organizations

“Are mindful of their responsibility and obligation to facilitate their staff’s personal and professional growth by addressing issues of stress associated with compassion fatigue.”

(Stoewen, Compassion Fatigue in The First Bite, 2006)
Healthy Organizations

- Create opportunities for staff to vary their caseload and work activities
- Honour the personal lives of staff, supporting them to take care of themselves and their families
- Empower staff through inclusivity in decision-making surrounding policies and procedures
- Create comfortable work environments, modeling the importance of the personal in the professional

(Stoewen, Compassion Fatigue in The First Bite, 2006)
• Promote professional development for their staff, recognizing it as integral to job endurance
• Sanction debriefing to allow staff to discuss the emotional components of their work
• Take the time to celebrate the sense of achievement found in the many success stories created, promoting compassion satisfaction
• Celebrate the lives of staff!

(Stoewen, *Compassion Fatigue* in *The First Bite*, 2006)
How do we treat it?

Action
Counselling Support

“Professional support to facilitate personal growth by addressing issues of stress associated with compassion fatigue.”

(Stoewen, *Compassion Fatigue* in *The First Bite*, 2006)
Medical Support

“Professional support to manage the more serious consequences of compassion fatigue.”

(Stoewen, Compassion Fatigue in The First Bite, 2006)
Hmmm...
Let’s paws...
We’ve Talked About...

What it is...
What it’s not...
What makes us vulnerable...
What it looks like...
What the consequences are...
How we manage it...
How we treat it...
So taking it from here...
Commitment

“An ounce of action... is worth a ton of theory.”

(Friedrich Engels, 1820-1895)
What will you and your staff do differently

• In the next week?
• In the next month?
• In the next year?

Make written, public, specific, and measurable commitments

• SMART goals are ideal
Group Discussions

- Improving Self Care
- Improving Social Care
- Supporting Coworkers
- Improving Boundaries
- Lifelong Learning
- Organization Strategies
Are you going to take better care of yourself?

- How are you going to do this?
    - What’s important to you?
    - What resonates with you?

- How can important others support you in this?
- How can you build lasting success?
Are you going to focus on the important people – and relationships – in your life?

• Who is important? Why are they important?
• How can you nurture and build such relationships?
• How can you create “sacred time”?

Are you going to reach out for expertise when you need to? (counselling +/- medical support)

• Why is this important?
• Are you worth it?
• Who will you call?
Are you going to support coworkers when they’re showing signs of CF and/or burnout?

• What kinds of behaviour are you noticing?
• Why is it important to “approach” rather than “avoid” or “ignore” behaviours that are unhelpful to others?
  • How do these behaviours influence others? (public, staff)
  • How do these behaviours influence the workplace culture?
• Who should approach them? You? A colleague? A manager?
  • Can there be both informal and formal support options?
• How can you approach them to share what you’ve noticed?
• What do you say? What do you do?
Are you going to maintain proper boundaries on your personal investment at work?

- How do you define and measure yourself?
- What kinds of self-talk do you engage in?
- How can you avoid over-extending yourself?

Are you going to maintain proper boundaries on your personal investment at home?

- How do you define and measure yourself?
- What kinds of self-talk do you engage in?
- How can you avoid over-extending yourself?
Are you going to firmly commit to continuing education and professional development?

- Why is this important?
- How does stagnancy contribute to burnout and CF?
- What *organized* and *self-directed* CE opportunities can and will you engage in?
- What ways might your organization support you?
- What ways might your organization benefit from this?
- How can you integrate new learnings into your organization?
- How will you integrate reading for pleasure?
Are you going to incorporate strategies in your organization that reduce the stress that contributes to compassion fatigue?

- How can the workplace better support staff wellness, health, and wellbeing?
- How can you support one another to take good care of yourselves and your families?
- How can you increase the sense of safety and support in the workplace?
- How can you create a positive work environment?
- How can you vary work activities?
Are you going to incorporate strategies in your organization that reduce the stress that contributes to compassion fatigue?

- How can you create a collaborative, facilitative, empowering, and “open door” approach to management?
- How can you create a more comfortable work environment?
- What kinds of internal and external options for support can you offer?
- How might clear protocols and processes for performance reviews help?
- What else???
The natural response to the downward spiral of compassion fatigue is to work harder until there is nothing left to give, which is counter to the adaptive response of taking a break. The symptoms of compassion fatigue are the same as those of chronic stress and are a consequence of caring for the needs of others before caring for your own needs. Compassion fatigue results from a lack of daily self-care practices that create opportunities to reflect, refuel, and rejuvenate.

The good news is that feeling compassion fatigue results from being a deeply caring person. When you care for yourself, you can care for others from a place of abundance not scarcity. With development of healthy self-care routines, you can continue to successfully provide compassionate care to others. Recognizing the signs of compassion fatigue is the first step toward positive change, and the second step is making a daily firm commitment to choices that lead to resiliency.

(Withrow & MacEwen, 2012)
Debbie Thank you!
At PetSmart Charities we believe in the human-animal bond. That’s why we’re here to help by supporting organizations that provide pets and their caretakers with tools to promote healthy pet ownership — including education, training and programs that help keep pets and families together.

Learn more about our mission: PetSmartCharities.org/pro


References


“If you want others to be happy, practice compassion.
If you want to be happy, practice compassion.”

〜 Dalai Lama 〜

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