Compassion Fatigue; Are You a Wounded Warrior

May 1, 2020
Wounded Warriors

Burnout

Compassion Fatigue

- Vicarious PTSD
• Definition: Response to prolonged exposure to demanding interpersonal situations, characterized by “emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a decreased sense of personal accomplishment.”
• Disengagement

• Blunted emotions

• Helplessness/hopelessness

• Life seems worthless
• Different, but related to CF and VPTSD
  ◦ Each seems to have unique effect on well-being

  ◦ Whole person circle
Compassion Fatigue
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- Deep physical, emotional and spiritual exhaustion accompanied by acute emotional pain
- Less empathetic, more withdrawn
- Difficult to maintain healthy balance between empathy and objectivity
At Risk for CF:

- Historically disadvantaged groups
- History of psychological trauma
- Lack of authentic community
- Lack of self-care
- Taught early to care for others first
Compassion Fatigue

One definition:

- Formal caregivers decreased capacity/interest in being empathetic or “bearing the suffering of their clients.” A behavioral and emotional state that results from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by another person.
Warning Signs:

- Lingering anger
- Chronic lateness
- Decreased sense of personal accomplishment
- Exhaustion (physical and emotional)
- Frequent headaches
• Warning Signs (continued):

◦ Gastrointestinal complaints
◦ Inability to maintain balance between empathy and objectivity
◦ Increased irritability
◦ Decreased ability to feel joy (vs happiness)
• PTSD
  ◦ Response to a traumatic event that includes actual or threatened death (or physical integrity) to you or someone else. Usually develops within 3 months of the event.
Vicarious (Secondary) PTSD

- Symptoms:
  - Intrusive memories
  - Flashbacks
  - Self destructive behaviors
  - Avoidance (thinking or talking about it)
  - Emotional numbness
  - Anhedonia
• Symptoms (continued):
  ◦ Hopelessness
  ◦ Memory problems
  ◦ Difficulty concentrating
  ◦ Difficulty with close relationships
  ◦ Sleep issues/dreams
Vicarious (Secondary) PTSD

- Symptoms (continued):
  - Increased anxiety
  - Hyperarousal/Hypervigilence
  - Irritability/Anger
  - Overwhelming guilt/shame
  - Startle easily
  - Hallucinations
• Form of Compassion Fatigue
  ◦ Can get this without working in trauma
  ◦ The work itself can be traumatic
  ◦ Actual neurological, chemical changes

• Symptoms
  ◦ Intrusive thoughts
  ◦ Increased startle response
  ◦ “Dangerous” worldview
  ◦ Interrupted sleep

Vicarious PTSD (Secondary PTSD)
• Personality Traits
  ◦ Perfectionist tendencies
  ◦ Pessimistic view of self
  ◦ Pessimistic view of the world
  ◦ Need to be in control
  ◦ Reluctant to delegate
  ◦ High achieving
  ◦ “Type A” personality
  ◦ Lone ranger
• Awareness
  ◦ Heightened self-awareness
  ◦ Self aware vs self-centered
• Community
  ◦ Relational creatures
  ◦ Brain functions better
  ◦ Heal better, learn more
  ◦ Joy center
  ◦ Searching/fearless inventory
  ◦ Who is your community?
• Assessment – Are you impaired?
  ◦ World view
    ◦ Level of hope
    ◦ Can you see beauty?
    ◦ Is the world a safe place?
    ◦ Do you trust?
    ◦ God

  ◦ Personal life
    ◦ Fun
    ◦ Touch
    ◦ Pray/meditate
    ◦ Addictions/habits
Now What? (Assessment)

- Personal life (continued)
  - Self care
  - Others care
  - Sense of self
  - Spouse
  - Family members
  - Internal awareness – thoughts & feelings
  - What stresses me?
Now What? (Assessment)

- **Professional Identity**
  - Do you feel vs are you competent?
  - Does what I do “work”?
  - Am I cynical/judgmental
  - Am I slow to return calls?
  - Do I run over in sessions/meetings? Or do I end them too quickly?
  - Do I dissociate during sessions/meetings?
  - Do I label the person?
  - Is my frustration level inappropriate for the situation?
Now What? (Assessment)

- Professional Identity (continued)
  - Do I often want to call off work?
  - Do I dread certain sessions/meetings?
  - Do I share (disclose) too much?
  - Am I using my flock for food?
  - What do I do with the goal of pleasing others?
  - What is my reputation in the community?
Now What? (Assessment)

- Organization
  - Am I expected to do more with less resources?
  - “I became a _____ because I love paperwork!”
  - Do I have more people to help than any reasonable person could?
- Musts
- Delegate
- Ignore
Now What?

- **Commitment**
  - Ongoing practice of replenishment
    - Increases vitality
    - Increases creativity
    - Increases intuitiveness
    - Increases clarity of thought

- **Boundaries**
  - How to say “no” well
  - Consider yourself fragile
• Staff the case
  ◦ State the dilemma
  ◦ Overview of the players
  ◦ Describe your own vulnerability
  ◦ State clearly what you want (BLUES)
    • Ideas
    • Support
    • Challenge
    • Hearing of a similar experience
    • Acknowledge when you’re ready to consolidate
      ◦ What you’re currently thinking
      ◦ What you’re feeling
      ◦ What you’re planning to do
Now What?

- Sabbath
  - Not a nap on the couch
  - Whole person circle
  - Retreat
  - Regularly scheduled vacations vs random days

- Plumber
• What’s resonating with you?

• What’s a new thought?

• What’s an old idea (for you) with a new twist?

• What are you going to do with what you’ve learned?
• Great Overview: www.ehcca.com/presentations/emsummit/5_03.ppt

• Compassion Fatigue: www.compassionfatigue.org/index.html
Catherine Jantzen
Licensed Mental Health Counselor

6334 Constitution Drive
Fort Wayne, IN 46804

cathy@catherinejantzen.com

(260) 209-1209