CLINICAL WEBINARS
FOR HEALTH SERVICE PSYCHOLOGISTS
TRANSLATING RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

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Compassion Fatigue Resilience: Taking Care of Yourself While Caring About Others

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1 CE Credit, Instructional Level: Intermediate
1 Contact Hour (New York Board of Psychology)

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Kerry A. Schwanz, PhD

Kerry A. Schwanz, PhD, is a Professor of Psychology at Coastal Carolina University. Before joining CCU, Dr. Schwanz worked as a school psychologist in South Carolina. She earned a PhD in 2001 from the University of Georgia. Her research interests are compassion fatigue, self-care, and compassion fatigue prevention and resilience. Along with a colleague, Dr. Schwanz is currently developing the Self-Care Behavior and Beliefs Scale (SCBBS) and an online intervention for compassion fatigue resilience called “ME FIRST.”
Disclosures/Conflicts of Interest

• I have no conflicts of interest to disclose
Learning Objectives

1. List signs and symptoms of compassion fatigue (CF).
2. Describe compassion satisfaction and self-care tools.
3. Identify skills and practices for preventing compassion fatigue and building compassion fatigue resilience (CFR).
References

Why Is It Important to Learn About Compassion Fatigue?

- Our society values and applauds those who engage in selfless acts of compassion and care towards others.

- However, decades of research on people in the helping professions has found some helpers pay a high cost for caring.

- Firefighters, police officers, and animal rescue workers have the highest suicide rate among American workers (Tiesman et al., 2015).

  - What do all three of these occupations have in common?
Compassion Fatigue

- The negative aspects of helping
- The high cost of caring
- A combination of physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual depletion associated with caring for others who are in significant emotional and/or physical pain or distress.
- Can occur due to exposure on one case or can be due to a “cumulative” level of trauma

Compassion Fatigue

- Burnout
- Secondary Trauma

Burnout

• Also called “cumulative stress”

• Associated with feelings of difficulty in dealing with work or doing your job effectively

• Can be associated with:
  • Too much work
  • Not enough resources (time, money, people etc.)
  • Non-supportive work environment
Secondary Traumatic Stress

• Occurs when one is exposed to extreme events directly experienced by another

• Becoming overwhelmed by the secondary exposure to trauma

• PTSD-related symptoms due to working with clients and families who have trauma, grief, significant emotional and/or physical pain or distress
Compassion
Fatigue Signs & Symptoms

• Affects many dimensions of your well-being
• Physical & emotional exhaustion
• Depression and/or hopelessness
• Nervous system arousal
  • Anxiety, Sleep problems
• Bottled-up emotions
• Isolation and loss of morale
Compassion Fatigue Signs & Symptoms

- Diminished sense of career/job enjoyment
- Increases in mistakes
- Substance overuse and abuse
- Poor relationships with co-workers
- Avoidance of clients/shifts
- Physical ailments
- Intrusive thoughts/nightmares
Some Risk Factors for CF

- Negative coping skills
- High levels of stress
- Low levels of social support
- Previous history of one’s own trauma
- Bottling up or avoiding emotions
- People who tend to be conscientious, perfectionistic and self-giving
- “Empathy overload”
So, you think you may be at risk for compassion fatigue...

• What
• Do
• You
• Do
• Now ?????
Tools and Skills for Prevention & Building Resilience

• **Awareness**
  • Obtaining education/training about CF
  • Knowing your own level of risk
  • Monitoring and prevention (staying aware)
  • Increasing Compassion Satisfaction

• **Self-Care**
  • Reducing stress
  • Balancing work and personal/home life
  • Strong social support/connections

• **Resilience**
  • ME FIRST – proposed online intervention for CFR
  • Fostering lifelong habits for prevention and bouncing back from CF
Professional Quality of Life

- Compassion Satisfaction
- Compassion Fatigue
  - Burnout
  - Secondary Trauma
Measuring CS & CF: The *Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL)*

- The ProQOL is free
- A 30 item self-report measure of the positive and negative aspects of caring
  - The ProQOL measures Compassion Satisfaction and Compassion Fatigue
  - Compassion Fatigue has two subscales
    - Burnout
    - Secondary Trauma
- Helps understand the positive and negative aspects of helping
- Not a “psychological test”
- Not a “medical test”
- Can be viewed as a screening for stress-related health problems

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For more information see [www.proqol.org](http://www.proqol.org)
Compassion Satisfaction

• The positive aspects of helping
  – Pleasure and satisfaction derived from working in helping, care giving systems

• May be related to
  – Providing care
  – Helping others through your work
  – Working toward the greater good
  – Work with colleagues
  – Beliefs about self (feel like what you are doing makes a difference)

• High levels of CS may mitigate negative effects of CF and increase resilience
Self-Care

- A positive form of coping that can help individuals deal with stress, a protective factor for CF and increases compassion satisfaction
- Includes activities where individuals devote time to focus on their own wellbeing and on re-fueling and revitalization
- Examples:
  - Taking a bath
  - Meditating
  - Eating healthy
  - Engaging in recreational sports
  - Getting adequate sleep/rest
Self-Care

• Natural Stress Reducers
  ◦ Adequate sleep
  ◦ Stay hydrated!
  ◦ Being in nature, exercise hobbies, and playing games

• Awareness of positives in life increases our happiness

• Start your day off right with something that feels good!

• People are habit forming
  • Add positive habits and be aware of habits that may be negatively impacting you

• Acknowledge small accomplishments before just moving onto the next task
Self-Care

• Nurture yourself by putting activities in your schedule that are sources of pleasure, joy and diversion

• Allow yourself to take mini-escapes- these relieve the intensity of your work

• More work does not always equal more reward
  • When we burnout, we will get less done overall

• Practice saying “No”
  • Literally, practice helps
  • Try rehearsing important “Nos” in the mirror
Self-Care

• Transitioning from WORK to HOME
  • Stop at the store on the way home
  • Take a walk
  • Take off your name tag and change out of your work clothes
  • Do a mindful activity!

• Build a positive support system
  • Talk out your stress
  • ASK FOR HELP!!!
  • Play and laugh with others!
  • Experience fun and joy!
Building CF Resilience

- **ME FIRST** – proposed online intervention for CFR
  - M = Mindfulness
  - E = Education
  - F = Feelings
  - I = Identify
  - R = Respond
  - S = Self-Care
  - T = Together

- Fostering lifelong habits for prevention and bouncing back from CF
Life Lesson: Put on your own oxygen mask before assisting others.
Q&A With Dr. Schwanz

• Dr. Sammons will read select questions that were submitted via the Q&A feature throughout the presentation.

• Due to time constraints, we will not be able to address every question asked.