

Compassion Fatigue: Caring for the Caregiver

Perinatal Nursing Care Conference
Clovis Community Medical Center
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If your compassion does
not include *yourself*,
It is incomplete.

Buddha

Our Objectives:

1. Define what is Compassion Fatigue and understand its two primary components: **Secondary Traumatic Stress** and **Burnout**
2. Recognize the signs of Compassion Fatigue.
3. Learn practical Compassion Fatigue resiliency skills and stress reduction.
4. Find ways to rediscover meaning in work/profession.

What makes being a practice
nurse in your context
especially challenging?

What makes being a practice nurse in your context especially challenging?

- Taking care/interacting with the vulnerable, ill and their families who are in high stress.
- Interacting with complex family dynamics and others' grief.
- Systemic challenges.
- Desire to heal and help, confronted by (at times) helplessness, disappointment, frustration.
- Our own internal responses can be distressing. (Moral distress)
- “No one (really) understands what we do!”

Take just a moment to **check in,**
internally... what feelings,
sensations, or thoughts arise as
you reflect on these challenges?



Our mission begins with Caring...

...and genuine caring requires compassion.



Compassion comes from the Latin words for “to suffer with,” and it carries the meaning of “a sympathetic consciousness of others’ distress together with a desire to alleviate.” (*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 11th edition [2003]*)

What is *Compassion Fatigue*?

“...a natural consequence of working with those who have experienced a trauma or another stressful event.” (C. Joinson, 1992)

“...a combination of **secondary traumatization** and **burnout** precipitated by the care delivery that brings health-care professionals into contact with the suffering.” (B. Szabo, 2006)

Two Primary Components of CF:

A. Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)

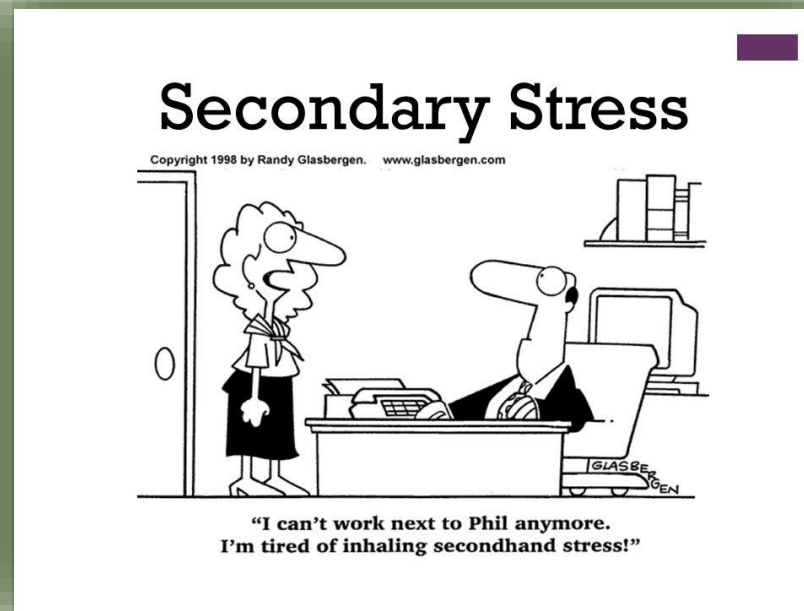
“...a **stress** coming from helping or wanting to help traumatized or suffering individuals. (C. Joinson, 1992)

“...a **debilitating condition** characterized by a change of behaviors or emotions associated in the act of helping or wanting to help others who have experienced traumatic events. (I. G. Mordeno, et. al., 2017)

Two Primary Components of CF:

A. Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) (*cont'd.*)

“...is a **‘natural consequence’** of empathy between two individuals, where one individual had been traumatized and the other one being affected by hearing about the traumatic experiences.” (I.G. Mordeno, et. al., 2017)



Two Primary Components of CF:

B. Burnout (BO)

“...is a **psychological syndrome** of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment.” (E.J.

Gentry, 2017)

“The **chronic condition** of perceived demands outweighing perceived resources.”

(E.J. Gentry, 2017)



Two Primary Components of CF:

Secondary Traumatic Stress + Burnout =

Compassion Fatigue



Misconceptions about *Care Giving*:

“It’s Hard Work, Darn It!”

- ✓ I will “fix” the problem...make everything O.K...save the world..
- ✓ I am responsible for outcomes.
- ✓ If I care enough, everything will be O.K.
- ✓ The sufferer/victim will appreciate everything I do for them.
- ✓ I will have enough resources (time, money, material, skills and training) to fix things.
- ✓ Significant people in my life will support and approve my absence from our relationship while I invest in this compassionate mission.
- ✓ I know what I am getting into.
- ✓ I can do it alone.
- ✓ If I’m spiritual enough, I can deal with the stress of working with suffering people.
- ✓ My definition of success is....



(Adopted from W. Wood)

Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue (STS + BO):

Intrusive Phase:

- Thoughts and images associated with the client's problems & pain.
- Obsessive or compulsive desire to help certain clients.
- Client/work issues encroaching on personal time.
- Inability to "let go" of mission related matters.
- Perception of clients as fragile and needing your assistance.
- Sense of inadequacy.
- Sense of entitlement.
- Perception of the world in terms of victims and perpetrators.
- Personal activities interrupted by mission/work.

(Adopted from S. Wood)



"Here I was, all this time, worrying that maybe I'm a selfish person, and now it turns out I've been suffering from compassion fatigue."

Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue (STS + BO):

Avoidance Phase:

- Silencing Response (avoiding client's stuff)
- Loss of enjoyment/cessation of self-care activities
- Loss of energy
- Loss of hope/sense of dread working with certain clients
- Loss of sense of competence/potency
- Isolation
- Secretive self-medication/addiction (alcohol, drugs, work, sex, food, spending, etc.)
- Relational dysfunction

(Adopted from S. Wood)

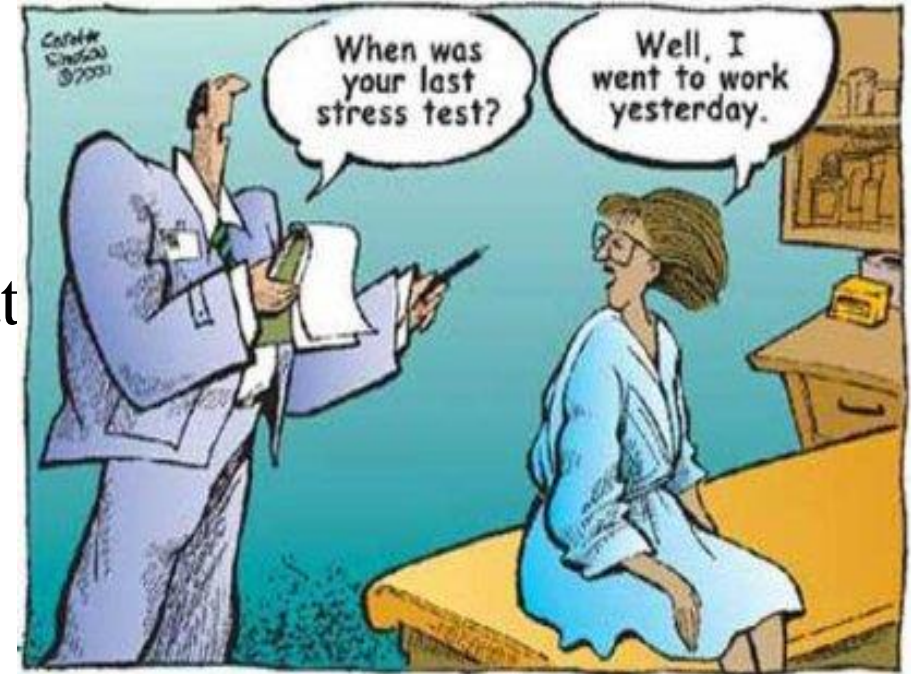


Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue (STS + BO):

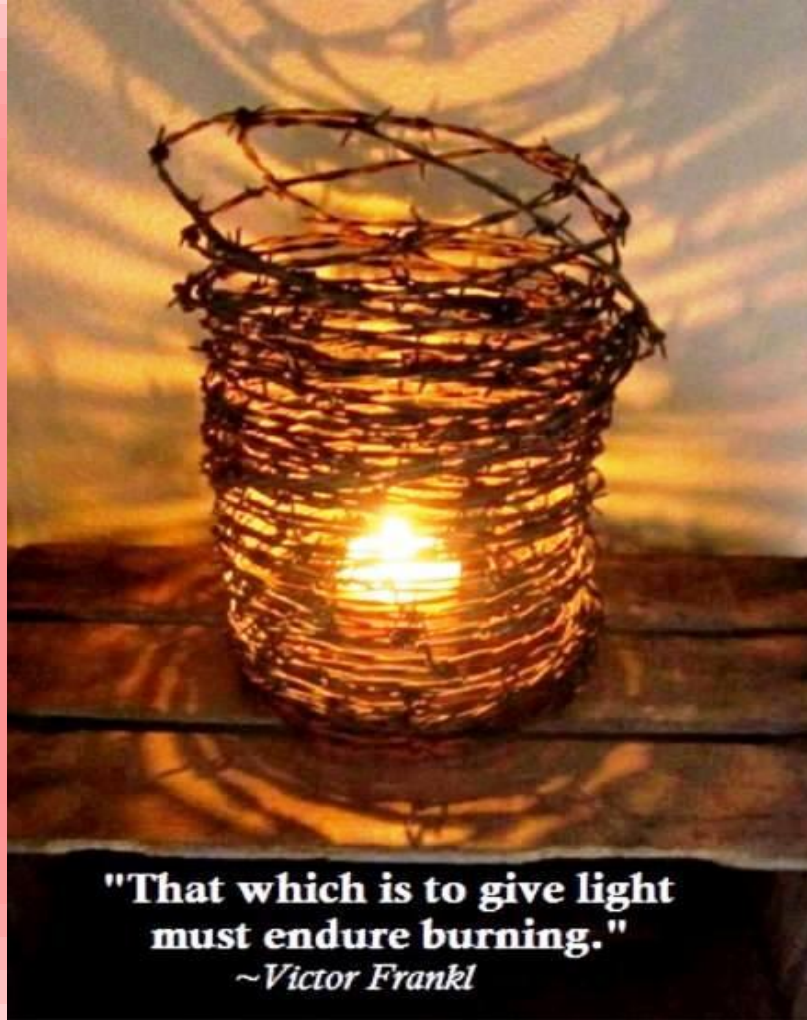
Arousal Phase:

- Increased anxiety
- Impulsivity/reactivity
- Increased perception of demand/threat
(in both job and environment)
- Increased frustration/anger
- Sleep disturbance
- Difficulty concentrating
- Change in weight/appetite
- Somatic symptoms

(Adopted from Rev. S. Wood)



Compassion Fatigue Resiliency/Stress Reduction Skills:



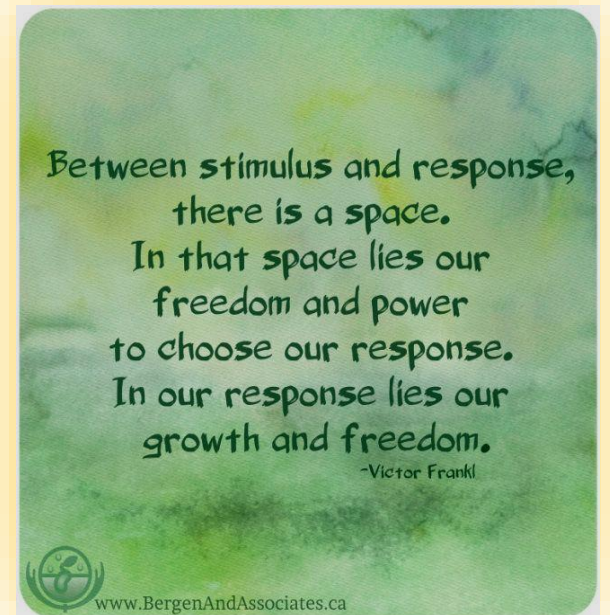
Compassion Fatigue Resiliency/Stress Reduction Skills:

- Please break up into teams of 3-5 member to brainstorm 3 ideas to help individuals overcome or prevent Compassion Fatigue (*Secondary Traumatic Stress and Burnout*) in their lives.
- OK let's do it!

Compassion Fatigue Resiliency/Stress Reduction Skills:

1. Awareness

- **Issues and contributing factors** (J. Hisken, C. Ward, 2015)
 - ✓ What in your work contribute to your stress level increasing your vulnerability to Compassion Fatigue?
 - ✓ Recognize the reality of working with ill people: there will be suffering and death.
- **Self-Regulation/Awareness/Maturation.** (J.E. Gentry, 2017)
 - ✓ Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue
 - **Mindfulness practice**
- **Self-Regulation/Awareness/Maturation.** (J.E. Gentry, 2017)
 - ✓ Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue
 - **“Relax the Body”** (vs. Fight or Flight when threat is perceived)



Compassion Fatigue Resiliency/Stress Reduction Skills:

1. Awareness (*cont'd.*)

➤ **Self-Regulation/Awareness/Maturation.** (J.E. Gentry, 2017)

- ✓ Remember who you are: **Mission, Intentions, Values, Principles**
 - Reputation vs. Integrity (What others think vs. what I value)
 - Self-Validation (“When we need outside validation then all human interactions are perceived threats”)
 - “It is not the environment that causes our stress, but instead what happens inside of us...”
 - “We can stop trying to manage those things that are beyond our immediate control...”
 - Distinguish between stressful aspects of your job or home life that you can change, and those you can't change-change what you can.

Compassion Fatigue Resiliency/Stress Reduction Skills:

2. Balance

- **Keeping your life in balance.** (J. Heskins, C. Ward, 2015)
 - ✓ and **Boundaries** – Learning when to say “No.”
 - ✓ Your “**Me**” calendar.
 - ✓ Transform the negative impact of your work (find meaning, practice gratitude, avoid negativity but cultivate positive emotions/thoughts – “**Fuel for Resilience**”)

- **We are humans and it’s OK to ask for help.**
 - ✓ Get professional help if needed.

Compassion Fatigue Resiliency/Stress Reduction Skills:

3. Connection

➤ **Develop and utilize support network.** (E.J. Gentry, 2017)

- ✓ Sharing Trauma Narratives.
- ✓ Empower to Confront
- ✓ Telling on Ourselves – “Secrecy is a potent virus that causes spiritual sickness.”
- ✓ Accountability



Compassion Fatigue Resiliency/Stress Reduction Skills:

4. Self-Care and Revitalization (E.J. Gentry, 2017)

- Regular exercise
- Healthy diet
- Good sleep hygiene
- Regular social activities
- Creative activity or hobbies, vacations
- Spiritual practices
- Professional enrichment, development



Compassion Fatigue Resiliency/Stress Reduction Skills:

- Please break up into teams of 3-5 members and brainstorm *three* things which can be done on the job to lessen or prevent the impact of Compassion Fatigue (*Secondary Traumatic Stress and Burnout*), and to make your job more meaningful and purposeful!
- OK, let's go!

Compassion Fatigue Resiliency/Stress Reduction Skills:

5. Organizational/Institutional

- Break the “culture of silence” related to compassion fatigue (*STS and Burnout*)
- Utilize continuing education that recognizes compassion fatigue as an expected occupational hazard, **not a weakness**.
- Provide physical settings that are comforting or soothing and offering meeting spaces that are appropriately furnished and private.
- In non-patient areas, allow for personal items that anchor caregivers to their lives outside of work.
- Provide adequate resources for the job, including regular and supportive supervision, continuing education opportunities, and personal growth/self-care (e.g. workshops on Stress Reduction & Management, acupuncture, massage, mindfulness practice, etc.)
- Develop opportunities for regular non-judgmental case discussion, in which all team members participate regardless of role.
- Encourage “peer-to-peer” support/consultation regularly in a safe, confidential and non-judgmental environment.
- Offer group sessions for debriefings and decompressions, especially after a difficult/stressful case.



Compassion Fatigue Resiliency/Stress Reduction Skills:

6. Self-Compassion

- Being kind and understanding towards oneself rather than being self-critical. (K. Neff, 2003)
- Self-attitude that involves treating oneself with warmth and understanding in difficult times and recognizing that making mistakes is part of human life. (K. Neff, 2003) (G.J. Breines & S. Chen, 2012).
- One is emotionally supportive toward both the self and others when hardship or human imperfection is confronted.”(L.M. Yarnell & Neff, 2012).



Compassion Fatigue Resiliency/Stress Reduction Skills:

6. Self-Compassion (*cont'd.*)

➤ **Components of Self-Compassion:** (K. Neff, 2003)

✓ Self-Kindness

- Kind and self-understanding to oneself in times of suffering, failure or when we feel inadequate.

✓ Shared Humanity

- Suffering and being imperfect are parts of the shared human experience.

✓ Mindfulness

- Observing our negative thoughts and emotions openly without judgment; they are just thoughts and emotions. They are not facts.

Compassion Fatigue Resiliency/Stress Reduction Skills:

6. Cultivate Self-Compassion (*cont'd.*)

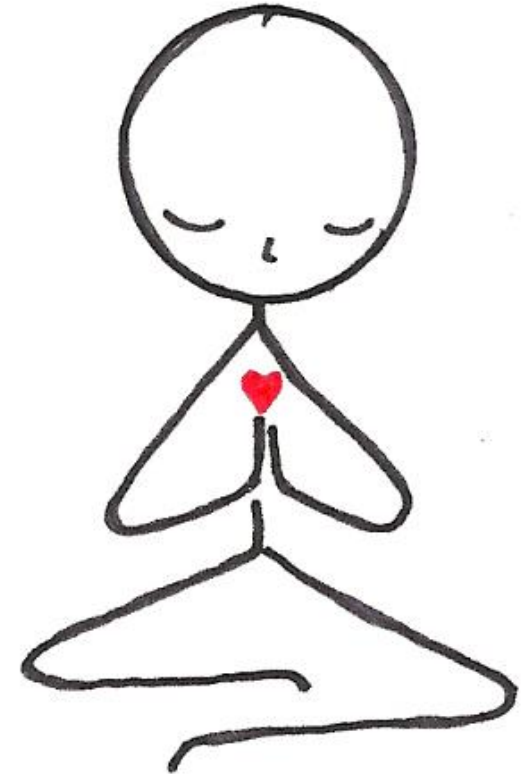
➤ **How to Practice Self-Compassion:** (D. Hampton)

- ✓ Consider how you would treat someone else.
- ✓ Become aware of your self-talk.
- ✓ Comfort yourself with a physical gesture.
- ✓ Say compassionate affirmations.
- ✓ Write a “Love Letter” to yourself.
- ✓ Practice “Self-Compassion/Mindfulness Break.”
 - This is a moment of suffering
 - Suffering is a part of life.
 - May I be kind to myself.



Practicing Self-Compassion Mindfulness

- **G - rounding**
- **R - remembering/Recalling**
- **A - cknowleding/Accepting**
- **C - elebrating**
- **E - empathizing**



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Resources:

Mindfulness Meditation Apps for Smart Phones:

- Buddhify
- Headspace (needs paid subscription, unfortunately ☹)
- Insight Timer
- Guided Mind (needs paid subscription but offers free ☺)
- Calm
- Chill
- Mindshift
- Simple Habits

Websites for Guided/Mindfulness Meditation

- <https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/mindful-meditations>

Sleep Hygiene Website

- https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about_sleep/sleep_hygiene.html