

HEALING THE HEALER, COMPASSION FATIGUE

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Friend, hope for the truth while you are alive.
Jump into experience while you are alive!
Think.....and think....while you are alive.
What you call "salvation" belongs to the time before death.
If you don't break your ropes while you're alive,
do you think ghosts will do it after?
—Kabir

Described by Dr. John Henry Pfifferling, PhD, a burnout called compassion fatigue, a deep physical, emotional and spiritual exhaustion accompanied by acute emotional pain. Whereas physicians with burnout adapt to their exhaustion by becoming less empathetic and more withdrawn, compassion-fatigued physicians continue to give themselves fully to their patients, finding it difficult to maintain a healthy balance of empathy and objectivity.

Those who have experienced compassion fatigue describe it as being sucked into a vortex that pulls them slowly downward. They have no idea how to stop the downward spiral, so they do what they've done since medical school: They work harder and continue to give to others until they're completely tapped out.

Compassion fatigue is increasing in physician as medical profession is becoming more demanding, overloaded with amount of paperwork and seeing more patients, and on the top pressures and demands of managed care today. Caring for self is essential for the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. In order to nurture and care for others it is important to learn to care for ourselves, and to maintain our health so that we can continue to be the "healers" that we are.

The following suggestions come from Dr. Pfifferling who is director of the Center for Professional Well-Being in Durham, N.C., which specializes in physician stress management.

1. Spend plenty of quiet time alone. Learning mindfulness meditation and excellent way to ground yourself in the moment and keep your thoughts from pulling you in different directions. The ability to reconnect with a spiritual source will also help you achieve inner balance and can produce an almost miraculous turnaround, even when your world seems its blackest.

2. Recharge your batteries daily. A regular exercise regimen and spirituality can reduce stress, help you achieve outer balance and re-energize you for time with family and friends.

3. Hold one focused, connected and meaningful conversation each day. Time with family and close friends feeds the soul.

4. We advise our compassion-fatigued clients not to make any major life decisions until they've recovered physically, emotionally and spiritually.

5. Similarly, blaming administration, staff, colleagues or the "system" will do you no good.

6. Compassion fatigue can make you vulnerable to addictive behaviors. There are a whole host of other addictive behaviors, including work, alcohol, sex or drugs and don't fall prey to a quick fix.

It is time for self care
And the only way that I can do it
Is by having lots of sleep
And there is nothing wrong with it
Because without sleep I can't function properly
Trust me I am not a machine
I am just me
Trying to do what is right for me
And healthy (Aldo Krass)

