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UNDERSTANDING COMPASSION FATIGUE:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND TOOLKIT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

COMPASSION FATIGUE (CF) TOOLKIT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: 3

 WHAT IS CF? 3

 WHO IS AT RISK? 3

 WHAT FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO COMPASSION FATIGUE? 3

SYMPTOMS OF COMPASSION FATIGUE 4

 EMOTIONAL: 4

 PSYCHOLOGICAL: 4

 EFFECT ON PROFESSIONAL INTEGRITY: 4

 INTELLECTUAL: 4

 PHYSICAL: 4

 RELATIONSHIPS: 4

TREATMENT OPTIONS: SELF-CARE 5

 THE BENEFITS OF WORKING IN THE HOSPICE: 5

HOW ADMINISTRATORS CAN HELP STAFF COPE: 6

 IMPORTABLE INTERVENTION STRATEGIES: 7



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COMPASSION FATIGUE (CF) TOOLKIT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

What is CF?

- State of psychic exhaustion, resulting from exposure to suffering of clients
- Unique to those in caregiving professions
- Thought to be the result of overexposure to suffering of others over time
- Treatable once recognized, but can lead to burnout or secondary traumatic stress if not recognized.

Who is at Risk?

- Those who show signs of being perfectionistic
- The self-giving or empathetic
- Seeing personal failure in any loss or suffering
- Those who lack self-confidence in communication skills
- Those who do not prioritize self-care
- Unaddressed personal trauma
- Low level of job satisfaction

What Factors Contribute to Compassion Fatigue?

- Time pressures, excessive hours working
- Excessive bureaucracy
- Ongoing team conflict
- Dealing with end of life
- Lack of adequate coping strategies
- Education - too little or too much both seen to make compassion fatigue worse



SYMPTOMS OF COMPASSION FATIGUE

Emotional:

- Easily irritable
- Decreased enthusiasm
- Sense of hopelessness
- Feeling overwhelmed

Psychological:

- Symptoms can often mirror PTSD
- Depression and anxiety-like symptoms
- Concern that work is intruding on personal life

Effect on Professional Integrity:

- Arriving late or being absent
- Diminished performance
- Exhaustion in workplace

Intellectual:

- Decreased concentration
- Decreased attention to detail

Physical:

- Decreased energy
- Decreased strength
- Decreased endurance
- Lack of sleep

Relationships:

- Appearing insensitive
- Isolating oneself from social circles
- Reduced level of empathy



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TREATMENT OPTIONS: SELF-CARE

- Workplace-specific coping strategies
 - Monitoring emotional investment into clients
 - Avoid perceiving oneself as a savior to patient
 - Establish boundaries between caregiver and patient
- Proper work-life balance
 - Physical and cognitive relaxation
 - Supportive social network
- Low-Impact Debriefing
<http://compassionfatigue.ca/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/Short-LID-article.pdf>
- Holistic approaches that address major life components
 - Self-care: physical, emotional, relational, spiritual
 - Re-assessing motivations
- Education
 - Learning effective ways of providing and receiving emotional-support
 - Communication skills workshops

The Benefits of Working in the Hospice:

- Increased and profound job satisfaction, by being frequently present for intimate part of life
- Hospice mentality: end of life is an accepted and expected outcome – it is a place where one is transitioning into death
- Exposure to dying heightens one's awareness to what is important in life



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HOW ADMINISTRATORS CAN HELP STAFF COPE:

- Have a manager who is supportive and not rigid
- Keep a consistent schedule
- Minimize confusion in tasks and roles
- Allow for greater staff autonomy and sharing in relevant decision-making
- Assign nurses to work with varied types of clients
- Reduce work hours for someone who's been involved in a difficult case
- Have staff attend conferences focusing on skill development
- Have monthly meetings to:
 - Increase knowledge about CF
 - Offer counseling and resources
 - Have team-building exercises and teach self-care exercises
 - Recognize staff accomplishments
- Proactive workplace interventions
 - Onsite counseling
 - Staff support groups
- Debriefing sessions
 - End of shift
 - After particularly stressful moment
- Develop debriefing skills in managers and employees
- Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) in the case of a particularly tough loss



Importable Intervention Strategies:

- Compassion Fatigue Solutions
 - <https://compassionfatigue.ca/services/>
- Accelerated Recovery Program
 - <http://psychink.com/training-courses/compassion-fatigue-courses/compassion-fatigue-specialist-therapist-207/>
- Compassion Fatigue Resiliency and Recovery Program
 - <http://psychink.com/training-courses/compassion-fatigue-courses/compassion-fatigue-resiliency-recovery-educator-107/>
- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction
 - <http://www.mindfulnessinstitute.ca/mbsr/>