

Compassion Fatigue- Be there for Others, But Never Leave Yourself Behind....

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*“Do Everything you have to do
But not with Greed
Not with Ego
Not with Lust
Not with Envy but with Love,
Compassion, Humility and Devotion”*

-Bhagavad Gita-

Bhagavad Gita says compassion is not simply a virtue to practice, but a holistic attitude that binds every person to everything with the bond of Divine love, one sees reflections of self everywhere because one realizes that one's self is the self of all.

But there is a cost of compassion and caring.....

Cambridge Dictionary states that compassion is a strong feeling of sympathy and sadness for the suffering or bad luck of others and a wish to help them. Compassion motivates people to go out of their way to help the physical, mental emotional pain of others. It involves allowing ourselves to be moved by suffering and developing the motivation to help to alleviate or to prevent it.

As per Indian mythology compassion is a virtue with many shades, each shades explained by different terms. The most common terms are *Daya, Karuna, Anukampa, Karunya* and *Kripa*.

Nursing is one of the noblest job where the professionals are not only equipped with professional knowledge but also love, compassion and empathy in the service they render. It not only involves utilization of physical and intellectual efforts but also emotional and mental capabilities. Professionals who listens to the stories of fear, pain and suffering of others may feel similar fear, pain and suffering because they care. Nurses are most susceptible group among all health care workers as they are in direct contact with miseries and pain of individuals both physical and mental.

Compassion Fatigue represents the cost of caring. It is the emotional residue of exposure to working with the suffering, particularly those suffering from the consequences of traumatic events. Professionals who work with people, particularly those who are suffering are experiencing not only normal stress or dissatisfaction of work, but also with the emotional & personal feeling of suffering.

Compassion fatigue is not Burn Out. Burn out is associated with stress and hassles involved in the work. It is very cumulative; is relatively predictable and a variation or change of job helps a great deal. Compassion fatigue is a difficult situation. It is a state of tension and preoccupation

with the individual or cumulative traumas of clients as manifested in one or more ways including reexperiencing the traumatic event and avoidance of reminders of the event .

Although similar to critical incident stress (being traumatized by something you actually experience or see) with Compassion Fatigue you are absorbing the trauma through the eyes and ears of your clients. It can be thought of us an secondary post traumatic stress.

There are human cost associated with Compassion Fatigue. Job performance goes down, morale drops and personal relationships are effected. People's home life start to deteriorate and eventually it can lead to overall depletion of general health.

Measures to combat Compassion Fatigue

- 1) Acknowledging the existence of Compassion Fatigue
Nurses are habituated in wearing the mask of happiness and readiness always though they are amidst insecurities and difficulties. Acknowledging the presence of Compassion Fatigue make the phenomena normal. Help nurses to recognize, accept and talk about Compassion Fatigue and making it a general topic of conversation is critical to create a nourishing work place.
- 2) Putting Compassion Fatigue as an important point in meeting agenda . Nurse managers can take out time to discuss and educate about this topic.
- 3) A small pinch of acknowledgement can do a great in raising the morale of the team. Administrators should acknowledge employees' contribution to patients and organizations. When organizational leadership recognize and thank nurses for their compassionate caring , they will fortify themselves and will be able to combat the sense of fatigue and will create a feeling that efforts to care don't matter.
- 4) Educational programmes regarding therapeutic communication, establishing boundaries, conflict resolution, ethical dilemmas and self care will be mentally enriching for the nurses.
- 5) Bring out the concept of Time Out for Nurses. Time Outs for the mind and heart to refill beyond physical needs especially in situations of critical and stressful

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events. Nurses may be provided with a quiet room with small refreshments to stay away for 10 to 15 minutes to refill and refresh their souls. But this time should not be an exchange for their normal breaks.

- 6) Debriefing the staff in regular interval is a necessary step to energize them. It gives a chance to speak out difficulties and asking suggestion to reduce Compassion Fatigue.
- 7) Budding of an experienced staff with a junior staff will help to alleviate anxiety and to help in adjustment with the work place. It is a planned method of mentorship.
- 8) Journaling of the intense experience by nurses can be a method to alleviate stress and to reduce Compassion Fatigue.
- 9) Offering collective ways to share experiences by simply talking, sharing of emotions, experiences and grief with others.
- 10) On site availability of supporting staff for counseling for nurses rather than nurses approach for support.
- 11) Formation and maintenance of self help group for the support of nurses.
- 12) Providing healthy food during duty hours to improve wellbeing and health of nurses and thus to improve morale will help to alleviate Compassion Fatigue.

Burn out, secondary traumatic stress and compassion fatigue are realities in today's healthcare environment which is not properly addressed. But individuals and hospitals do not have to be incapacitated by nurses who detach from the care they provide as a coping mechanism. By learning how to influence and create positive cultural change for individuals and organizations nurses can practice to the fullness of their profession.

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