





“Caring”  
Related  
Stressors  
Unit 2



- “shell shock by proxy”
- “old sergeant’s syndrome”
- vicarious traumatization
- secondary traumatic stress
- compassion fatigue
- moral distress



## Empathy & Compassion



- Empathy

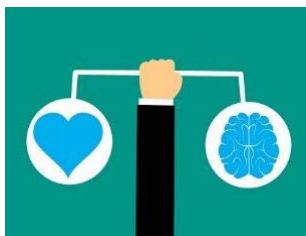
Ability to perceive, imagine, feel, understand, and respond to what another is experiencing

- Compassion

A feeling of concern & the motivation to alleviate the suffering of another



## Neurophysiology



- Observing the suffering of others
- Results in dual activation of neural pathways involving both:
  - automatic (non-conscious) - recreating in ourselves the physiological emotional experience
  - &
  - executive (conscious) - using cognitive processes that regulate empathic responses & altruistic helping

Russell & Brickell, 2015



## Vicarious Traumatization



“cumulative transformation of the professional helper's sense of self, beliefs, and world view that comes about as a result of empathic engagements with traumatic disclosures”

Devilly et al; McCann & Pearlman



## Effects of Vicarious Traumatization



- Become cynical or lose hope
- Avoid social or work contact
- Become fearful and overprotective (the world is seen as dangerous)
- Set rigid boundaries in relationships
- Display a lack of boundaries and feel they must rescue others
- Abandon spiritual beliefs



## Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder

Triggered by witnessing the distress of others in the aftermath of trauma



Reaction resembling PTSD, that includes symptoms parallel to those observed in people directly exposed to trauma

- ☐ Intrusion: Re-experiencing traumatic events
- ☐ Avoidance/numbing of reminders of the event
- ☐ Persistent psychological arousal

Burnett & Wahl, 2015; Pack, nd.



## Compassion Fatigue

- “losing ability to nurture”
- emotional, physical, & spiritual fatigue or exhaustion
- results from repeated exposure to witnessing and absorbing the suffering of others
- transmitted via clients or patients to health professionals through empathic listening
- causes a decline in the health professional’s ability to experience joy or to feel & care for others, and sometimes for themselves



Figley, 2002; Florida Center for Public Health Awareness



## Predictors of Compassion Fatigue



- Strong personal empathic orientation
- Difficulty saying no - unassertive conflict management styles
- Being unable to psychologically distance oneself
- Low compassion satisfaction

Figley, 2002; Poulsen, 2014



## Phases of Compassion Fatigue



1. Idealistic phase
2. Irritability phase
3. Withdrawal phase
4. 'zombie' phase
5. Pathology & victimization

OR

Maturation & renewal

Gentry & Baranowsky, 2002



## Human Costs Associated with Compassion Fatigue



- Diminished job performance
- Increased tardiness and absenteeism
- Declining physical health
- Poor morale
- Low energy
- Decreased self-care ability
- Stressed personal relationships
- Increased substance abuse
- Depression
- Irritability



## Assessing Risk

ProQOL - Personal Quality of Life Scale Version 5 (2009)

[http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/335673/tool\\_e\\_professional\\_quality\\_of\\_life\\_scale.pdf](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/335673/tool_e_professional_quality_of_life_scale.pdf)



Stamm et al, website accessed 2018

