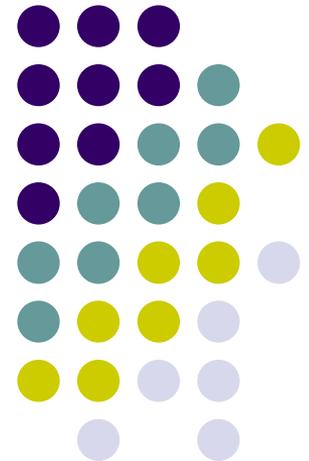


Euthanasia and Compassion Fatigue

The Costs of Caring





“Euthanasia technicians often experience guilt, grief, and frustration as a result of their job. They are also at risk of experiencing a unique type of stress that is not typical to other workplaces. At the same time, workers with euthanasia-related responsibilities often feel stigmatized for the work they do, despite the fact that they perform work that is often necessitated by pet owner irresponsibility and negligence” (Barran et. al, 2009).

What is Compassion Fatigue?



- **Compassion**
 - A feeling of deep empathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by suffering or misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the pain or remove its cause; it is necessary although not sufficient component of helping.
- **Compassion Satisfaction**
 - Refers to the helper's motivation to help which is shaped, in part, by the satisfaction derived from the work of helping others; also plays a vital role in the equation of human and animal services.
- **Compassion Fatigue**
 - A condition that is the result of a depletion of one's internal emotional resources due to exposure to emotionally charged or "critical incidents"; it is the cost of caring for others in emotional or physical pain.

What is Compassion Fatigue?



- Compassion fatigue is the natural consequence of stress resulting from caring for and helping traumatized or suffering people or animals (Figley, 1993).
- Compassion fatigue is classified as secondary traumatic stress disorder.
 - Secondary stress occurs when a person witnesses an event that involved death or serious injury.

What is Compassion Fatigue?



- The following components are necessary for compassion fatigue to occur:
 - Caregiver relationship
 - Human-animal bond
 - Empathy
 - Merriam –Webster Dictionary defines this as the imaginative projection of a subjective state into an object so that the object appears to be infused with it. It is the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner.
 - Must have the ability to empathize.
 - Strong desire to help alleviate the animals suffering and/or pain

Additional Work Stressors that can Contribute to CF



- Burnout
 - An emotional condition which arises from organizational stressors such as policies, procedures, and bureaucratic issues which may result from a difficult work environment and lead to emotional and physical syndromes; burnout is a significant contributor to compassion fatigue because it intensifies the sense of exhaustion one experiences during compassion fatigue.
 - Result of stress and inability to accomplish goals.
 - Symptoms of burnout include:
 - Depression, cynicism, loss of compassion, and discouragement.

Burnout Vs. Compassion Fatigue



- May appear at the same time but they are not the same thing.
 - Compassion fatigue is sudden or acute and results from experiencing highly emotional situations while not caring for one's own needs.
 - Burnout is a gradual wearing down of helpers who feel overwhelmed by their work and inability of facilitating positive change. Can be caused by excessive dedication and commitment to work, perfectionism, responsibility without authority, lack of positive feedback, an unrealistic expectations.

Who Does Compassion Fatigue Effect?

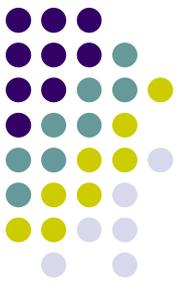


- Compassion fatigue is pervasive in animal shelters and the animal-control community.
 - By-product of multiple high risk exposures?
 - Examples of high risk exposures:
 - Public perception that the work is low level and “not noble”
 - Budget cuts
 - Physical environment: space, noise, and lighting
 - Co-workers
 - Volume of animals

Animal Care Workers and CF



The demand to be compassionate hour after hour and day after day, in all kinds of happy and sad situations, is a requirement for animal-care workers, but it can lead to stress and the development of compassion fatigue.



Remember

- Negative emotions seem to have a greater effect on people than do positive emotions.
- “People reflect on and think about events inducing strong negative emotions five times as long as they do about events inducing strong positive ones” (Robbins, 2005).
- Compassion fatigue can be directly traced to the negative situations and the negative emotions that all animal caregivers encounter.

Is Compassion Fatigue Contagious?



- As you reach out to others to relieve painful emotions, that person absorbs some of the pain.

Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue



Cognitive	Emotional	Behavioral	
Diminished concentration Confusion Spaciness Loss of meaning Decreased self-esteem Preoccupation with trauma Trauma imagery Apathy Rigidity Disorientation Whirling thoughts Thoughts of self-harm or harming others Self-doubt Perfectionism Minimization	Powerlessness Anxiety Guilt Anger/rage Survivor guilt Shutdown Numbness Fear Helplessness Sadness Depression Hypersensitivity Emotional roller coaster Overwhelmed Depleted	Clingy Impatient Irritable Withdrawn Moody Regression Sleep disturbances Appetite changes Nightmares Hypervigilance Elevated startle response Use of negative coping (smoking, alcohol or other substance abuse) Accident proneness Losing things Self-harm behaviors	
Spiritual	Interpersonal	Physical	
Questioning the meaning of life Loss of purpose Lack of self-satisfaction Pervasive hopelessness Ennui Anger at God Questioning of prior religious beliefs	Withdrawn Decreased interest in intimacy or sex Mistrust Isolation from friends Impact on parenting (protectiveness, concern about aggression) Projection of anger or blame Intolerance Loneliness	Shock Sweating Rapid heartbeat Breathing difficulties Aches and pains Dizziness Impaired immune system	
Impact on Professional Functioning			
Performance of Job Tasks	Morale	Interpersonal	Behavioral
Decrease in quality Decrease in quantity Low motivation Avoidance of job tasks Increase in mistakes Setting perfectionist standards Obsession about details	Decrease in confidence Loss of interest Dissatisfaction Negative attitude Apathy Demoralization Lack of appreciation Detachment Feelings of incompleteness	Withdrawal from colleagues Impatience Decrease in quality of relationship Poor communication Subsume own needs Staff conflicts	Absenteeism Exhaustion Faulty judgment Irritability Tardiness Irresponsibility Overwork Frequent job changes

Source: Figley 2006

Recognizing Compassion Fatigue



- Afflicted individuals usually go through 4 phases:
 - **Zealot phase:** In this stage the individual feels committed, available, and ready to make a difference. Willing to work long hours and enthusiasm in unending.
 - **Withdrawal phase:** In this stage enthusiasm turns sour and the bubble bursts. Complaints about work begin to surface, tired all the time, and avoid talking about work. Individual begins neglecting family, friends, coworkers, and themselves.
 - **Irritable phase:** In this stage the individual starts avoiding animal contact. Use of humor is strained. Lapses of concentration begin occurring and they distance themselves even further.
 - **Zombie phase:** In this stage all hopelessness turns to rage. The individual begins to loathe any and all people, including coworkers. Others become incompetent and there is disdain for animals. Patience is minimal.

Effects of Compassion Fatigue



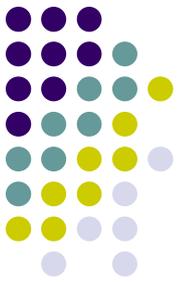
- Anthropomorphism
 - Is the assignment of human characteristics to non-humans.
 - Envisioning animals as humans
 - When this occurs the pressure to do what is in the best interest of the animals vs. what the caregiver wants to do intensifies
 - One-on-one extended relationships makes it more likely to occur
- Misanthropy
 - Is the dislike or mistrust of humans.

What is Your Level of Satisfaction?



- There are good days and bad days.
 - How are you going to handle the bad days?
 - Need to be able to turn to someone or something that will increase your level of satisfaction with this work.
 - To remind you that you are good at what you do and what you do is very important.
 - To remind you why you are doing this work.
 - To remind you that the successes and joys far outnumber the failures or setbacks.
 - How are you going to do this?

What Can You do to Combat CF?



- Realize that you have chosen an “at-risk” profession
 - The work you love can cause you pain and can be toxic
- Put yourself first
 - Those who do not adequately care for themselves or allow for time and energy to attend to their own emotional needs are at risk for developing symptoms seen with compassion fatigue.
- Remember: You stand in the way of more suffering by doing your best everyday
- Focus on the good not the bad
 - Compassion satisfaction vs. compassion fatigue
- Learn to say no and to ask for help

What Can Your Employers do to Combat CF?



- Provide regular breaks
- Prioritize and delegate appropriately
- Allow for time at staff meetings to discuss emotional components of your work
- Debrief after difficult situations/incidences
- Have a strong support system in place for employees

Stress Management at Work



- How are you going to calm yourself at work?
 - Breathing exercises
 - Meditation
 - Safe and joyful place visualization
 - Self-hypnosis
 - Self-talk or self-advise
 - Peer support

Stress Management Away From Work



- When you are away from work physically are you away mentally?
 - Do you have some hobbies or activities that take your mind away from work?
 - Are you committed to self care?



The key to overcoming compassion fatigue is to learn to become resilient to it. While you may not be able to prevent its occurrence, resilience can lessen the blow.

You need to be able to put things into perspective and realize that the work you do is good enough.

“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson



Remember



Compassion fatigue is not a reflection of one's character, professionalism, or professional skill level; rather, it signifies the individual's willingness to be emotionally engaged with others who are hurting, grieving or having a difficult time.



**And you thought
there was stress
in your life !**