Compassion Fatigue
2013 Veterinary Social Work Summit
April 12, 2013
“All of us who attempt to heal the wounds of others will ourselves be wounded; it is, after all, inherent in the relationship.”

David Hilfiker, *Healing the Wounds: A Physician Looks at His Work* (1985)
...is recognized as “the greatest threat to personal, professional, and financial success among those who truly provide compassionate care.”

Veterinary Economics (2005)
Workshop Agenda

- What makes us vulnerable?
- What is compassion fatigue?
- What it is not?
- What does it look like?
- What are the consequences?
- What protects us?
- How do we prevent it?
- How do we treat it?
- Where do we go from here?
What makes us vulnerable?
The Nature of the Work

- It draws caring people
- Relationship-centred practice
- Increasing client expectations
- Minimal division of responsibilities
The Nature of the Work

✓ Unique and ever-changing schedules

✓ Long hours

✓ Illness, disease, death, and dying

✓ "Cradle-to-casket" care
The Nature of the Work

- Hospice care
- Economic-based healthcare
- Euthanasia
Compassion Fatigue

What is it?
“A feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by suffering or misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the pain or remove its cause.”

Webster’s Dictionary (1989)
“Weariness, lassitude, or exhaustion of strength.”

Webster’s Dictionary (1989)
“The natural consequent behaviours and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other – the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person.”

Figley, *Treating Compassion Fatigue* (2002)
Compassion Fatigue

- Two necessary variables:
  - A care-giving relationship
  - The desire to make things better

- Compassion fatigue occurs when the demands for caring exceed one’s ability and resources to provide that caring
Compassion Fatigue

Primary Traumatic Stress

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Cumulative Stress

CF
Compassion Fatigue

Primary Traumatic Stress

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Cumulative Stress

CF
Primary Traumatic Stress

Dealing with your own trauma, pain, or loss

- Death in the family (including an animal)
- Separation/Divorce
- Car accident
- Alcoholism/addictions
- Major disease diagnosis
- Mental illness
- Family violence
Compassion Fatigue

Primary Traumatic Stress

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Cumulative Stress

CF
Secondary Traumatic Stress

- Dealing with someone else’s trauma, pain, or loss
  - Clients
  - Patients
  - Veterinary healthcare team members
Compassion Fatigue

Primary Traumatic Stress

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Cumulative Stress

CF
Cumulative Stress

❖ Professional
  - Intense workplace demands and stress
  - Expectations unmet
  - Inability to achieve work-related goals
  - Powerlessness
  - Long hours
  - Staff discord
  - Boredom with routines

❖ Personal
  - Intense family demands and stress
  - Family conflict
  - Personal health problems
  - Financial concerns
  - Housing difficulties
  - Social isolation
Compassion Fatigue

Primary Traumatic Stress

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Cumulative Stress

CF
The Compassion Fatigue Process (Figley, 2001)
What is it not?

Burnout
Burnout

✓ Arises from excessive, prolonged, and unrelieved work-related stress
✓ Driven by organizational concerns, policies, procedures, and bureaucracy
✓ The consequence of a disconnection between the individual’s expectation around role performance and the organization’s structure to support the role
Burnout

✔ A cumulative and sometimes unconscious process
✔ Physical, emotional, and work-related symptoms
  ✔ exhaustion, sleeping difficulties, somatic problems, irritability, anxiety, depression, guilt, helplessness, aggression, callousness, pessimism, defensiveness, cynicism, lack of humour, inability to concentrate, dehumanization, social withdrawal, risk-taking, substance abuse, poor work performance, poor client interactions, avoidance of clients, perfunctory communication, tardiness, absenteeism, and quitting

✔ Treatable (but may require changing jobs/careers)
TYPICAL WORK WEEK

Sunday
Don't speak to me!!

Monday
Life is slowly seeping back into my body!

Tuesday
God, get me through this day!

Wednesday
Please let me die!

Thursday
Anticipation!

Friday

Saturday
Compassion Fatigue

What does it look like?
Fatigue Symptoms

**Intrusive**
- unwanted recollections and ruminations
- flashbacks
- nightmares

**Constrictive**
- active efforts to avoid the thoughts, feelings, activities, and situations that repeatedly remind one of the pain, suffering and loss

**Hyperarousal**
- sleep disturbances
- general anxiety
- difficulty concentrating
- exaggerated startle response
- feelings of agitation or irritability
- hypervigilance
Fatigue Symptoms

- Personality change
- Reduced sympathy and empathy for others
- Mood swings, anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts or gestures
- Anger and irritability
- Tearfulness
- Negative self-image
- Being easily startled

- Lethargy, physical and emotional exhaustion
- Loss of efficiency and reliability
- Indecision
- Memory loss, forgetfulness
- Inappropriate clinical judgement
- Compromised patient care
Fatigue Symptoms

- Unpredictable work habits and patterns
- Becoming accident prone
- Excessive time at work
- Increased sick time and time away from work
- Alcohol on the breath
- Heavy “wastage” of drugs
- Physical deterioration
- Interpersonal problems

- Client and staff complaints about changing attitude or behaviour
- Increasing personal and professional isolation
- Skepticism, cynicism, embitterment, and resentment
- Avoiding certain patients, clients, and euthanasias
What are the consequences?

Compassion Fatigue
Consequences

✓ Physical and Mental Health
  – stress-related physical ailments such as headaches, gastrointestinal upsets, and chronic pain and fatigue
  – psychiatric conditions such as dissociative disorders, mood disorders (including anxiety and depression), substance abuse (including gambling, smoking and alcohol), eating disorders, and personality disorders

✓ Professional Competence and Success
  – poor veterinary-client/co-worker relationships
  – compromised patient care
Consequences

✔ Vocational Direction and Development
  - engage in premature job changes
  - drop out of private practice

  “Compassion fatigue has driven both promising and seasoned professionals out of their professions entirely, permanently altering the direction of career paths.”

✔ Organizational Welfare
  - spreads “as a contagion” to pan-systemically – and detrimentally – affect hospital climate and outcomes
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Protective Qualities

What protects us?
Acknowledgment

“Admission that compassion fatigue exists and recognition of an at-risk status.”
Self-awareness

“The application of self-reflective skills to continuously monitor the self.”
Emotional Intelligence

“The ability to understand and regulate one’s own emotions, or feelings, and those of other people.”
Adaptive Coping Capacity

“The processes that individuals use to modify adverse aspects of their environment as well as to minimize internal threat induced by stress.”
Coping Guidelines

✓ Don’t own other’s pain

✓ Beware of boundary issues
  – Maintain perspective surrounding your personal investment
  – Remain connected with your own resources

✓ Let go of things that cannot be controlled

✓ Remember that you are not what you do
Compassion Satisfaction

“The pleasure you derive from being able to do your work well.”

How do we prevent it?
Good Self-care Discipline

“Nourish your body, mind and spirit to sustain and maintain both your personal and professional life.”
Self-care Practices to Maintain Balance

- Maintain a healthy diet
- Take daily walks
- Interact with children and animals
- Get in touch with nature and the outdoors
- Exercise and participate in sports
- Practice relaxation techniques
- Schedule time to simply relax and read or play
- Embrace spirituality
- Volunteer and contribute to your community
- Cultivate interests, activities, and hobbies beyond work
- Pursue any passions you might have!
Why it is better to be the boss...
Healthy Relationships

“Intentionally affiliate with those who share your values, believe in you, and nurture your growth to enhance your well-being”
Healthy Relationships

Affiliate with those who:

- Care about each other and show it
- Genuinely like one another
- Joke around and/or pitch in when needed
- Pick-up on even the most subtle mood changes of fellow workers and ask about them in a caring and supportive manner

Compassion Fatigue in the Animal-Care Community
Healthy Organizations

“Are mindful of their responsibility and obligation to facilitate their employee’s personal and professional growth by addressing issues of stress associated with compassion fatigue.”
Healthy Organizations

- Create opportunities for team members to vary their caseload and work activities
- Honour the personal lives of staff, supporting members to take care of themselves and their families
- Empower staff through inclusivity in decision-making surrounding policies and procedures
- Create comfortable work environments, modeling the importance of the personal in the professional
Healthy Organizations

- Promote professional development for their employees, recognizing it as integral to job endurance.
- Sanction debriefing to allow healthcare team members to discuss the emotional components of various client and patient interactions.
- Take the time to celebrate the sense of achievement experienced in the many success stories created, promoting compassion satisfaction.
- Celebrate the lives of staff!
How do we treat it?
Counselling Support

“Professional support to facilitate personal growth by addressing issues of stress associated with compassion fatigue.”
Medical Support

“Professional support to manage the more serious consequences of compassion fatigue.”
Commitment to Action

Where do we go from here?
“An ounce of action... is worth a ton of theory.”

Friedrich Engels

German Social Scientist & Philosopher (1820-1895)
Commitment to Action

What can you do in the next week?
What can you do in the next month?
What can you do in the next year?

Written, public, specific, and measurable promises of self-care, healthy relationship-building, and positive contribution to the development of a healthy workplace
“If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.”

Dalai Lama