MRAD 223 – Patient Care 1

Burnout and Compassion Fatigue-Watch for the signs

For health care leaders, balancing mission with regulatory and fiscal realities means facing up to the future that demands *delivering higher quality healthcare to more people at a lower cost*. In the struggle to provide quality, compassionate care in a climate that offers fewer resources and at the same time adapt to new business models, leaders can underestimate the strain on their frontline caregivers. ***But losing sight of burnout and compassion fatigue-which is a type of burnout- puts both the health care workers and their patients at risk*** .

It takes a multi-pronged approach to minimize the negative impact. The organization and its policies play a key role by creating conditions that not only reduce the risk of burnout and compassion fatigue, but also *promote healthy, more effective workers*.

Workers involved in *direct patient care are exposed to suffering and negativity on a daily basis*. They face increasing demands in the workplace while at home they juggle family life, personal interests and often care for their own children and their aging parents as well.

Researches have described how burnout affects:

1. Quality of treatment for patients
2. Lowers morale
3. Increases absenteeism, with an accompanying financial impact on the hospital/clinic.
4. Increase in staff turnover due to stress. Again this takes a financial toll as well.

Professional caregivers and their employers need to learn to recognize signs of burnout and compassion fatigue because people in helping roles are at greater risk.

Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue is *a type of burnout*. It emerges suddenly and with little warning and it is usually more pervasive than burnout. A person experiencing compassion fatigue can feel;

1. A loss of meaning and hope and can have reactions associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) such as;

a) strong feeling of anxiety
b) difficulty concentrating
c) being jumpy or easily startled
d) irritability
e) difficulty sleeping
f) excessive emotional numbing
g) Intrusive images of another's traumatic material. Past traumas can also be activated.

The **most susceptible individuals who could suffer from compassion fatigue** are:

1) An individual exposed *to traumatic events*

2) An individual *with little experience* in their profession.

Long term effects of compassion fatigue include: *reduced empathy, diminished sense of personal safely, reduced sense of control, hopelessness, increased involvement in escape activities and chronic overeating, drug or alcohol use.*

Much of the research on compassion fatigue has focused on counselors and first responders who work with trauma victims. There is overlap between burnout and compassion fatigue, and an individual can suffer from both. They share some symptoms and both take a toll on health and on relationships. Though people suffering from compassion fatigue often love their jobs.

People suffering from compassion fatigue involves a preoccupation with a trauma patient or his or her trauma, and it doesn't require being present at the stressful event. Simply being exposed to another person's painful narrative can be enough. *Many caregivers focus on others at the expense of their own well-being.*

It is crucial for health care workers to replenish themselves and commit to having a life outside of work that includes daily nurturing activities. People often understand this concept intellectually, but the knowledge doesn't necessarily lead to taking better care of themselves.

Reference: Burnout and Compassion Fatigue-Watch for the Signs by Dennis Portnoy