UNDERSTANDING COMPASSION FATIGUE:
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND TOOLKIT

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COMPASSION FATIGUE (CF) TOOLKIT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

What is CF?
- State of psychic exhaustion, resulting from exposure to suffering of clients
- Unique to those in caregiving professions
- Thought to be the result of overexposure to suffering of others over time
- Treatable once recognized, but can lead to burnout or secondary traumatic stress if not recognized.

Who is at Risk?
- Those who show signs of being perfectionistic
- The self-giving or empathetic
- Seeing personal failure in any loss or suffering
- Those who lack self-confidence in communication skills
- Those who do not prioritize self-care
- Unaddressed personal trauma
- Low level of job satisfaction

What Factors Contribute to Compassion Fatigue?
- Time pressures, excessive hours working
- Excessive bureaucracy
- Ongoing team conflict
- Dealing with end of life
- Lack of adequate coping strategies
- Education - too little or too much both seen to make compassion fatigue worse
### SYMPTOMS OF COMPASSION FATIGUE

#### Emotional:
- Easily irritable
- Decreased enthusiasm
- Sense of hopelessness
- Feeling overwhelmed

#### Psychological:
- Symptoms can often mirror PTSD
- Depression and anxiety-like symptoms
- Concern that work is intruding on personal life

#### Effect on Professional Integrity:
- Arriving late or being absent
- Diminished performance
- Exhaustion in workplace

#### Intellectual:
- Decreased concentration
- Decreased attention to detail

#### Physical:
- Decreased energy
- Decreased strength
- Decreased endurance
- Lack of sleep

#### Relationships:
- Appearing insensitive
- Isolating oneself from social circles
- Reduced level of empathy
TREATMENT OPTIONS: SELF-CARE

- Workplace-specific coping strategies
  - Monitoring emotional investment into clients
  - Avoid perceiving oneself as a savior to patient
  - Establish boundaries between caregiver and patient
- Proper work-life balance
  - Physical and cognitive relaxation
  - Supportive social network
- Low-Impact Debriefing
- Holistic approaches that address major life components
  - Self-care: physical, emotional, relational, spiritual
  - Re-assessing motivations
- Education
  - Learning effective ways of providing and receiving emotional-support
  - Communication skills workshops

The Benefits of Working in the Hospice:

- Increased and profound job satisfaction, by being frequently present for intimate part of life
- Hospice mentality: end of life is an accepted and expected outcome – it is a place where one is transitioning into death
- Exposure to dying heightens one’s awareness to what is important in life
HOW ADMINISTRATORS CAN HELP STAFF COPE:

- Have a manager who is supportive and not rigid
- Keep a consistent schedule
- Minimize confusion in tasks and roles
- Allow for greater staff autonomy and sharing in relevant decision-making
- Assign nurses to work with varied types of clients
- Reduce work hours for someone who’s been involved in a difficult case
- Have staff attend conferences focusing on skill development
- Have monthly meetings to:
  - Increase knowledge about CF
  - Offer counseling and resources
  - Have team-building exercises and teach self-care exercises
  - Recognize staff accomplishments
- Proactive workplace interventions
  - Onsite counseling
  - Staff support groups
- Debriefing sessions
  - End of shift
  - After particularly stressful moment
- Develop debriefing skills in managers and employees
- Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) in the case of a particularly tough loss
Importable Intervention Strategies:

- Compassion Fatigue Solutions
  - https://compassionfatigue.ca/services/
- Accelerated Recovery Program
- Compassion Fatigue Resiliency and Recovery Program
- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction
  - http://www.mindfulnessinstitute.ca/mbsr/