

Spiritual Care for Health Care Providers

February 2, 2009 – 3:30-5:00 p.m.

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Purpose and Expected Outcomes

- Explore and identify aspects of the health care setting that lead to compassion fatigue and burn out in health care providers and ultimately jeopardize care of patients.
- Identify spiritual practices and settings to provide spiritual care to and improve the spiritual well-being of health care providers.
- Participant will create an action plan to implement change in their own settings.

Part I

The Dilemma

Compassion Fatigue is experienced as a deep physical, emotional and spiritual exhaustion accompanied by acute emotional pain. In contrast to typical burnout in which one becomes less empathetic and more withdrawn, those suffering often find difficulty maintaining healthy balance between empathy and objectivity, working harder to compensate for increased demand or stress, continuing to give from a depleted state resulting in fatigue, cynicism and isolation. To save time, self care is often eliminated perpetuating the downward spiral.

- **Compassion Fatigue** (also called Vicarious Traumatization and Secondary Trauma): resulting from trauma experienced by patients
- **Burnout:** resulting from increased workload and institutional stress
- **Counter-transference:** resulting from how patients' experiences reflect and affect the caregivers' lives, social networks, work, and relationships.
- **Boundary person:** "those who emerge because the very force of life draws them out and up toward the vital areas where the future is trying to be born." Dr. Gary Gunderson

Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue:

Spiritual: increasing doubt; lack of desire to participate in spiritual community that previously provided spiritual sustenance; bitterness and anger toward God; distrust of people who provide spiritual care

Psychological: grief, rage, anxiety, depression, panic attacks, numbness, negative attitude

Physical: weight changes, fatigue, sleep disorders, dizziness, weakness, impaired resistance to infections

Behavioral: chronic lateness, isolation, substance abuse, poor concentration, irritable

Warning Signs: Abuse of substances (alcohol, drugs, food), anger, blaming, chronic lateness, diminished sense of personal accomplishment, exhaustion, frequent headaches, GI complaints, high self-expectations, hopelessness, hypertension, imbalance of empathy and objectivity, increased irritability, less able to feel joy, low self-esteem, workaholicism.

Reflection question: Can you think of providers who may have compassion fatigue. What features? What behaviors or experiences have you had or noticed about health care providers that indicate their own spiritual needs and issues affect patient care?

Part II

Spiritual Practices for Health Care Providers:

- Mindfulness practices (breathing, walking slowly, meditation and prayer, exercise outdoors)
- Daily personal rituals (hand washing, walking through doorways, finding sanctuary in the health care setting, savoring a cup of tea)
- Group rituals (Blessing of the hands, weekly chapel prayer/meditation service, memorial services)
- Actively visit areas of the health care setting visibly filled with hope
- Meet regularly (monthly) with a trustworthy spiritual director or companion
- Engaging in communities (nature, exercise, social, spiritual/religious)
- Sacred Spaces (Chapel, labyrinth, gardens, traveling caring carts)
- Mind, Body, Spirit Centers for employees
- E-mail (inspirational spiritual quotes, prayer needs)
- Paid retreat days provided by health care system offering CEUs

Reflection Question: What current spiritual support exists to recognize and assist the spiritual needs of doctors, nurses and other health care staff in your setting or experience?

Part III

Local Solution: Developing an Action Plan

- A. Identify a situation in your health care center where spiritual needs for health care providers exist:
- B. What supports, interventions, and resources might you offer:
 - a. Choose the one most achievable:
 - b. How would you invite participation:
- C. What hurdles exist within the system:
- D. What inner reservations do you notice?
- E. Who are your allies in your setting or experience?
- F. Outline a brief action plan:

Resources: Visit the Web page of Spiritual Directors International dedicated to Spiritual Care for Health Care Providers, www.sdiworld.org. Feel free to submit resource suggestions to the resource collection, office@sdiworld.org. Participate in the blog discussion, <http://info.sdiworld.org>