

**THE HEROES YOU NEVER SEE:
BRINGING YOUR WHOLE SELF
TO COMPASSIONATE CARE SETTINGS**
Harold Ivan Smith, D. Min., FT
haroldivansmith@gmail.com
HeartLight 11 April 2023

“Caregivers may perform a number of concrete functions,
but the essential product they deliver is themselves.”
C. Joinson (1992)

Anticipating & Acknowledging Compassion Fatigue

Sooner, or later, regardless of credentials, vita, resume, or years of service, a professional experiences the

“I don’t know what to say” moment

“I don’t know how much longer I can do this!” moment

The Question: “What am I pretending not to know?”

Daily Work with Challenges Professional Caregivers

Three “danger zones” [Janoff-Bulman, 1985]

“Listening to stories of human suffering can set into motion a process
whereby helping professionals begin to question their core beliefs.”
Patrick Morrissette (2004) 63

- Personal vulnerability
- The positive view of oneself
- That the world is meaningful and orderly.

ADT: *Attention Deficit Trait*

- Distractibility

- Inner frenzy
- Impatience

“The ADT sufferer therefore feels a constant low level of panic and guilt. Facing a tidal wave of tasks, the worker becomes increasingly hurried, peremptory, and unfocused, while pretending that everything is fine.”

E.M. Hallowell (2008) 4

Brian Bride’s University of Georgia study of social workers

- ▶ **40%** thought about their work without intending to
- ▶ **22%** reported feeling detached from others
- ▶ **26%** felt emotionally “numb”
- ▶ **28%** had a sense of foreshortened future
- ▶ **27%** reported irritability
- ▶ **28%** reported concentration difficulties

Complicating Factors for ADT

Constant availability

“Never before in history has the human brain been asked to track so many data points. Everywhere, people rely on their cell phones, email, and digital assistants in the race to gather and transmit data, plans, and ideas faster and faster.”

E.M. Hallowell (2008) 7

“When you are confronted with the sixth decision after the fifth interruption in the midst of a search for the ninth missing piece of information . . . and the twelfth impossible request has blipped unbidden across your computer screen, your brain begins to panic, reacting just as if that third decision were a bloodthirsty, man-eating tiger.”

E. M. Hallowell (2008) 8

- ▶ **Constant exposure to noise**

“As our minds fill with noise—feckless synaptic events signifying nothing—
the brain gradually loses its capacity
to attend fully and thoroughly to anything.”
E.M. Hallowell (2008)

▶ **Continuous exposure to multiple dimension “terrible” news**

“People bring to work the stress aroused by dealing with family problems, taxes, and traffic jams, as well as anxieties stemming from a continuous diet of bad news that upsets them and makes them feel helpless—hurricanes, politics, child abductions, wars, terrorist attacks, environmental devastation, you name it.”
Herbert Benson (2008) 70

24/7 Lifestyle

▶ **Demand for the nonprofit “athlete” (Loehr & Schwartz, 2008)**

The inclination for busy social workers

“. . . is to live in a perpetual state of triage, doing whatever seems most immediately pressing while losing sight of any bigger picture. . . .”
J. Loehr & T. Schwartz (2008) 62

▶ **Self-flagellation**

▶ **Evaluative stress**

“Employees who seem unable to keep up the pace
are seen as deficient or weak.”
E.M. Hallowell (2008) 10

Stress is the oxygen in many professional, organizational and personal settings

▶ **Baggage from home and personal relationships**

Taking “kind care” of you!

“ADT is a very real threat to all of us
If we do not manage it, it manages us.”
E.M. Hallowell (2008)

Some, although excellent in offering kind compassionate care to parishioners, clients and patients, may be slow to implemental personal kind care.

- ▶ TURN off the news
- ▶ RESERVE some “still” time.
- ▶ WEIGH e-mail
- ▶ IDENTIFY times daily when you are at your best.

“Sit down!
Hush up!
Stop trying to fix things!
Be still for a while.”

Recommendations, Lois Wagner, RN
(in Palmer, 2009)

- ▶ INVEST lavishly in human moments:

An authentic psychological encounter that can happen only when two people share the same physical space.

- ▶ PAY ATTENTION to what you are eating
- ▶ INVEST in a massage.

“For every insult you heap on your body
it will seek and find its ultimate revenge!”
Fritz Perls

Three significant questions (Edwin Schneidman)

- ▶ “Where do you hurt?”
- ▶ “How can I help?”
- ▶ “How willing am I to be inconvenienced?”

psychache

Memoir-ing

- Memoir “slice”: 3 pages/double space
- Entraining memoir

“Writing memoir is a way to figure out who you used to be
and how you go to be who you are.”

Abigail Thomas, *Thinking About Memoir*

Making Gratitude

Three gratitudes daily

- ▶ REMIND yourself of the “rippling” effect

“Rippling refers to the fact that each of us creates—
often without our conscious intent or knowledge—
concentric circles that may affect others
for years, even for generations.”

Irwin Yalom (2008) 83

Citations in This Presentation

Benson, Herbert. (2008). Are you working too hard. In E.M. Hallowell (Ed.), *Bringing your whole self to work* (pp. 67-82). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review.

Hallowell, E.M. (2008). Overloaded circuits: Why smart people

underperform. *Harvard Business Review on bringing your whole self to work* (pp. 1-21). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review.

Janoff-Bultman, R. (1985). The aftermath of victimization: Rebuilding shattered assumptions. In Charles Figley (Ed.) *Trauma and its wake: The study of treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder*. (Vol. 1, pp. 15-25). New York: Brunner/Maze.

Joinson, C. (1992). Coping with compassion fatigue. *Nursing*, 22, 116-121.

Loehr, Jim, & Schwartz, Tony. (2008). The making of a corporate athlete. In E.M. Hallowed (ed.), *Bringing your whole self to work*. (pp. 43-66). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Reivew.

Morrisette, Patrick J. (2004). *The pain of helping: Psychological injury of helping professionals*. New York: Brunner-Routledge.

Thomas, Abigail. (2008). *Thinking about memoir*. New York: AARP/ Sterling.

Wagner, Lois. (2005 Summer). Cited in Palmer, Anita. Writing the last chapter: PLNU school of nursing professor advises tackling end-of-life issues now. *Viewpoint*, 3-5.

Yalom, Irvin D. (2008). *Staring at the sun: Overcoming the terror of death*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.