

Addressing Compassion Fatigue in your Practice

Megan R. Snyder, MSW-LISW-S
Ohio Lawyers Assistance Program

What is OLAP?

- In 1979, a group of lawyers and judges in alcohol recovery met in the chambers of then Franklin County Common Pleas Judge Craig T. Wright. This group formed the OSBA Lawyer Assistance Committee
- As the number seeking help increased, the Ohio Supreme Court began to change discipline and admissions rules to take "recovery" into account
- In 1991, the OSBA incorporated Ohio Lawyers Assistance Program, moving it from a volunteer group to a non-profit agency. In 2002, clinicians were added to the staff to address clients' mental health concerns

What is OLAP?

- OLAP is a non-profit agency funded by the Ohio Supreme Court to help lawyers, judges and law students who have substance abuse, chemical dependency, process addictions, and mental health concerns
- Main office is located in Columbus
- Mission: Educate the profession about substance abuse, chemical dependency and mental health disorders, perform interventions, conduct assessments and provide recommendations, as well as, provide support and monitoring

How does OLAP help?

- Clinicians at OLAP conduct detailed psycho-social assessments to screen for substance abuse and mental health concerns
- Make recommendations
 - Therapy, psychiatry, treatment programs, 12 step meetings
- Offer contract for support and monitoring when appropriate
 - Regular contact by phone
 - Written documentation
 - Letters from treatment providers
 - Meeting logs

What is Stress?

- Stress is simply a reaction to a stimulus that disrupts our physical or mental equilibrium
- A stressful event can trigger the fight or flight response, causing hormones (adrenaline) and (cortisol) to surge through the body
- Stress is a natural part of our lives

• (Psychology Today)

Stress-Defined

- Stress, if within your comfort zone can help you perform under pressure
- Can motivate you to do your best
- Even keep you safe in times of danger
- When stress is overwhelming it can damage your mood, relationships, and lead to a host of serious mental and physical problems

Statistics on Lawyers and Stress

- The official number is that something like a gazillion lawyers are stressed out, and that amounts to a bajillion percent of the profession," observes Meyerhofer, who became a licensed clinical social worker after benefitting tremendously from therapy he himself underwent to "get a grasp on what happened to me in BigLaw."

Stress

- Because current culture deems "doing it all" as a badge of honor it can be hard for some to recognize how stressed they actually are
- Becoming aware of your stress and its causes, you take steps to reduce the negative effects and begin to improve your daily life

Can Stress be Good?

- Due to the negative effects of stress, it has been cast in a negative light. There are positive effects, and they tend to get ignored.
- Stress can be helpful and good, especially when it motivates people to accomplish more
- Increased stress results in us experiencing increased productivity. Up until that point, it is productive, after which things can go down hill
- Everyone has a different level of stress tolerance and our signals for too much differ greatly
 - (The American Institute of Stress)

Body's Response to Stress

- When your need or think you are in need of defending yourself or run away from danger, your body prepares for **MOBILIZATION**
- **MOBILIZATION**-body responds for emergency action (fight or flight)
- If mobilization fails-the body freezes and **IMMOBILIZATION** occurs.

Stress

- Our bodies and our nervous systems do a poor job of distinguishing between daily stress and life threatening events
- Our bodies respond the same way regardless if the threat is real or imagined
- Constant stress responses (chronic stress) can lead to serious health problems

•

•

Body Systems Interrupted

- Immune system
- Digestive system
- Reproductive system
- High blood pressure
- Increased risk of heart attack and stroke

•

•

Health Issues

- There are several health issues caused or exacerbated by stress:
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Skin problems
- Pain
- Weight issues
- Autoimmune disease
- Digestive issues
- Cognitive and memory issues

Emotional Symptoms

- Depression
- General unhappiness
- Anxiety and agitation
- Moodiness, irritability, anger
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Loneliness and isolation

Behavioral Symptoms

- Eating more or less
- Sleeping changes
- Withdrawing from others
- Procrastinating
- Using alcohol or drugs to cope
- Nervous habits

Causes of Stress-External

- Anything , good or bad that puts high demands on you can be stressful:
- Promotions
- Buying a home
- Getting married or divorced
- Going to college
- Retiring

Causes of Stress-Internal

- Self generated feelings such as excessive worry
- Pessimistic view of life
- Negative view of life
- Negative self talk
- Unrealistic expectation of self and others
- Perfectionism
- All or nothing thinking
- Lack of flexibility

.

.

How much is too much?

- Each person has a different level and tolerance to stress and it is called Stress Tolerance
- There are many factors influencing each persons stress tolerance:
- Emotional Awareness
- Quality of your relationships
- Physical activity
- Diet
- Sense of control
- Attitude and outlook

.

.

Stress Tolerance

- Knowledge and preparation
- The factors impacting stress tolerance are not fixed. You have more control over stress than you might think
- Get moving
- Connect with others
- Engage your senses
- Relaxation time

Improving Stress Tolerance

- Eating healthy diet
- Get your rest
- Be grateful

Ten Practical Ways to Handle Stress

- Determine where your stress is coming from
- Consider what is controllable
- Do what you love
- Manage your time well
- Create a tool box of techniques
- Take off negotiables from your plate
- Are you leaving yourself vulnerable to stress?
- Preserve good boundaries
- Realize difference between worry and caring
- Embrace mistakes

Resources for Stress

- [Helpguide.org](http://helpguide.org)
- Emotional Intelligence Tool Kit (helpguide.org)
- Psychology Today
- The American Institute of Stress

What is Compassion Fatigue

- It is the cumulative physical, emotional and psychological effect of exposure to traumatic stories or events when working in a helping capacity, combined with the strain and stress of everyday life
- It is a state experienced by those helping people in distress. It is an extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped to the degree that it can create a secondary traumatic stress for the helper

What is Compassion Fatigue

- It is the cumulative physical, emotional and psychological effect of exposure to traumatic stories or events when working in a helping capacity, combined with the strain and stress of everyday life
- It is a state experienced by those helping people in distress. It is an extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped to the degree that it can create a secondary traumatic stress for the helper

Compassion Fatigue defined (con't)

- Compassion fatigue is NOT burnout. Burnout is a severe state of exhaustion or lack of energy that is usually brought on by unreasonable work expectations. Burnout is considered to be more difficult to identify and harder to reverse.
- It is also called vicarious trauma, secondary traumatic stress, second hand shock and secondary stress reaction. Regardless of the term used, compassion fatigue affects those in the helping professions, and is treatable

Statistics

- Some research suggests compassion fatigue among attorneys is almost five times higher than other professions
- Women are significantly more likely than men to experience compassion fatigue
- Criminal, family and juvenile attorneys are at a high risk, as are any professional who read victim statements, look at crime scene photos, and autopsy pictures

Risk Factors

- Those with high caseloads, high capacity for empathy
- Being blindsided by the nature of the trauma being shared or described
- Poor affect tolerance
- Fragile sense of self
- Rigid or inflexible world view
- Underdeveloped or lack of spirituality
- Poor or absent interpersonal relationships
- Childhood trauma, or any processed trauma

Fatigued?

- Compassion fatigue symptoms are normal displays of chronic stress resulting from care giving work we choose to do
- Eric Gentry, leading traumatologist , suggests people are attracted to care giving often enter the field already compassion fatigued.
- A possible explanation is that there is a strong identification with helpless, suffering, or traumatized people
- It is common for these people were taught at an early age to care for the needs of others ahead of their own

Recognizing Compassion Fatigue

- These are normal displays of stress resulting from care giving work you perform on a regular basis
- Excessive blaming
- Bottled up emotions
- Isolation from others
- Receives unusual amount of complaints from others
- Voices excessive complaints about administrative functions
- Substance abuse to mask feelings
- Compulsive behaviors (shopping, eating, gambling and sex)

Symptoms Con't

- Poor self care
- Recurrences of nightmares and flashbacks of traumatic events
- Chronic health issues
- Sad, depressed
- Difficulty concentrating
- Preoccupied
- Denial of the problems

Organizational Impact

- Chronic absenteeism
- High turnover rates
- Friction between employees
- Friction between staff and management
- **Symptoms:**
- High absenteeism
- Inability for teams to work together
- Inability of staff to complete assignments/projects
- Desire of staff to break company rules
- Strong reluctance towards change

How do we fix it?

- It is common for care givers to cope with their emotions by stuffing their feelings and when this happens repeatedly, these emotions will refuse to be ignored. This is when psychological and physical problems present themselves
- Awareness of self, past traumas and defeating behaviors is essential to the path to wellness
- Self care begins with you

Wellness

- First you must be kind to yourself
- Enhance your awareness with education and support
- Acceptance of where are you on your path
- Share and exchange information with people who validate and support you
- Clarify your personal boundaries-what works for you and what does not
- Express your needs verbally
- Take positive action to change your environment

•

•