

# ***Compassion Fatigue***

## **Caring until it Hurt**



**Presented by**

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**Veterinary Specialty Practice Alliance**  
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## **Compassion Fatigue: Caring until it hurts: An experiential workshop**

### ***Overview***

This interactive workshop is designed to help those in veterinary practice learn coping skills to manage the distress from over-emphasis on caring for clients and patients and under-emphasis on care of self. As veterinary professionals, we want to do what is best for clients and patients which is best achieved by professionals who recognize the importance of self-care. This program will provide veterinary professionals with the knowledge to recognize the early signs of CF and the skills to prevent and manage CF in order to reclaim the satisfaction, hope and inspiration that led to the choice of this career path.

### ***Module Goal***

To reduce the incidence of compassion fatigue (CF) among veterinary professionals.

### ***Learning Objectives***

**By the end of the module, learners will:**

1. Describe the nature and scope of Compassion Fatigue (CF)
2. Recognize symptoms of CF seen in the veterinary professional
3. Identify strategies for limiting the effects of CF on the veterinary professional
4. Select and commit to using at least 2 CF-reducing strategies in veterinary practice

### ***Background***

This workshop is an abbreviated version of a 4+ hour module that was developed by IHC and funding by Bayer Animal Health. This is one of 14 communication skill-building modules which are being taught in veterinary schools throughout the United States, Canada, and more recently in Australia and Portugal with plans to expand into veterinary technician programs in the U.S. and Canada.

### ***Module Format and Resources***

A bibliography has been developed and is included with this workbook. We encourage you to use the bibliography after the workshop as a resource to pursue issues in greater depth.

For more information about the Bayer Animal Health Communication Project, visit the IHC website at [www.healthcarecomm.org](http://www.healthcarecomm.org) and click on VETERINARY COMMUNICATION.

### Exercise 1: Pair Share - Appreciative Inquiry

1. Pair up – as assigned.
2. Your task will be to interview each other.
3. Decide who will answer the question first.
4. Interviewing Question: *“Tell me about an experience at work where you felt you made a difference.”*
5. Both partners rotate role of being interviewed and being the interviewer. Be alert, notice and listen carefully in both roles.

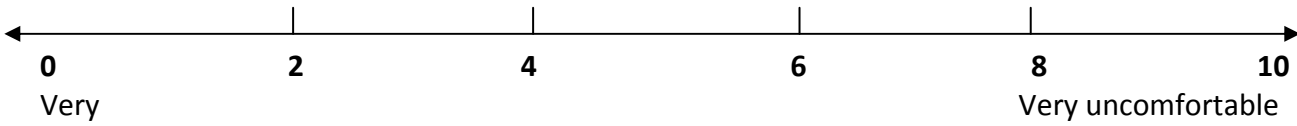
NOTES:

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#### Post Interview



**SELF:**

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**YOUR PARTNER:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_

## Feelings Inventory\*

The following are words we use when we want to express a combination of emotional states and physical sensations. This list is neither exhaustive nor definitive. It is meant as a starting place to support anyone who wishes to engage in a process of deepening self-awareness and discovery and to facilitate greater understanding and connection with others. There are two parts to this list: feelings we may have when our needs are being met and feelings when our needs are not being met.

### Feelings when your needs are satisfied

#### **AFFECTIONATE**

compassionate  
friendly  
loving  
open hearted  
sympathetic  
tender  
warm

#### **ENGAGED**

absorbed  
alert  
curious  
engrossed  
enchanted  
entranced  
fascinated  
interested  
intrigued  
involved  
spellbound  
stimulated

#### **HOPEFUL**

expectant  
encouraged  
optimistic

#### **CONFIDENT**

empowered  
open  
proud  
safe  
secure

#### **EXCITED**

amazed  
animated  
ardent  
aroused  
astonished  
dazzled  
eager  
energetic  
enthusiastic  
giddy  
invigorated  
lively  
passionate  
surprised  
vibrant

#### **GRATEFUL**

appreciative  
moved  
thankful  
touched

#### **INSPIRED**

amazed  
awed  
wonder

#### **JOYFUL**

amused  
delighted  
glad  
happy  
jubilant  
pleased  
tickled

#### **EXHILARATED**

blissful  
ecstatic  
elated  
enthralled  
exuberant  
radiant  
rapturous  
thrilled

#### **PEACEFUL**

calm  
clear headed  
comfortable  
centered  
content  
equanimous  
fulfilled  
mellow  
quiet  
relaxed  
relieved  
satisfied  
serene  
still  
tranquil  
trusting

#### **REFRESHED**

enlivened  
rejuvenated  
renewed  
rested  
restored  
revived

\* Adapted from The Center for Non-Violent Communication <http://www.cnvc.org/>

## Feelings when your needs are not satisfied

### **AFRAID**

apprehensive  
dread  
foreboding  
frightened  
mistrustful  
panicked  
petrified  
scared  
suspicious  
terrified  
wary  
worried

### **ANNOYED**

aggravated  
dismayed  
disgruntled  
displeased  
exasperated  
frustrated  
impatient  
irritated  
irked

### **ANGRY**

enraged  
furious  
incensed  
indignant  
irate  
livid  
outraged  
resentful

### **AVERSION**

animosity  
appalled  
contempt  
disgusted  
dislike  
hate  
horrified  
hostile  
repulsed

### **CONFUSED**

ambivalent  
baffled  
bewildered  
dazed  
hesitant  
lost  
mystified  
perplexed  
puzzled  
torn

### **DISCONNECTED**

alienated  
aloof  
apathetic  
bored  
cold  
detached  
distant  
distracted  
indifferent  
numb  
removed  
uninterested  
withdrawn

### **DISQUIET**

agitated  
alarmed  
discombobulated  
disturbed  
perturbed  
rattled  
restless  
shocked  
startled  
surprised  
troubled  
turbulent  
turmoil  
uncomfortable  
uneasy  
unnerved  
unsettled  
upset

### **EMBARRASSED**

ashamed  
flustered  
guilty  
mortified  
self-conscious

### **FATIGUE**

beat  
burnt out  
depleted  
exhausted  
lethargic  
listless  
sleepy  
tired  
weary  
worn out

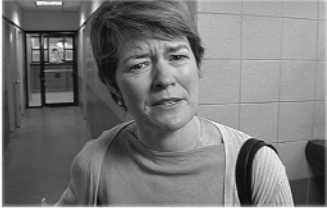
### **PAIN**

agony  
anguished  
bereaved  
devastated  
grief  
heartbroken  
hurt  
lonely  
miserable  
regretful  
remorseful

### **SAD**

depressed  
dejected  
despair  
despondent  
disappointed  
discouraged  
disheartened  
forlorn  
gloomy  
heavy hearted  
hopeless  
melancholy  
unhappy

Veterinary practice is stressful



**Veterinary professionals continuously respond to the needs of clients and patients and expend their own emotional resources to provide care and caring to others.**

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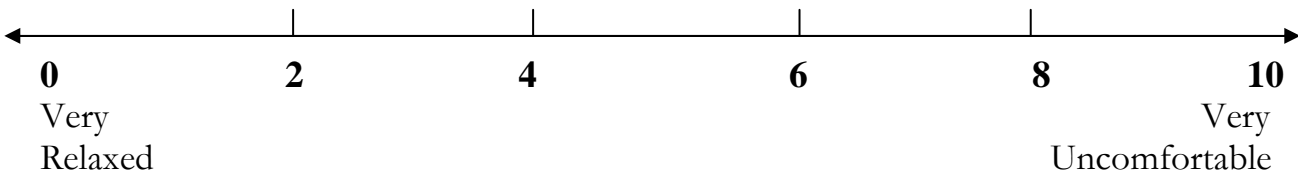
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### Exercise 2: Video Review



What am I experiencing, e.g., physically?

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What am I thinking?

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What am I feeling?

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## Exercise 3 Silent Witness

**YOUR TASK:** Please write down three (3) most emotionally challenging aspects or situation of your caring for others in practice. This should include those interactions you have trouble letting go of emotionally and/or that drain you emotionally. Write three short phrases to describe your experiences concisely and legibly so others may read it as you share it during the exercise.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_


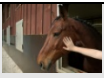
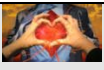
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Exercise 4: Self-Care and Awareness Invent





This inventory is not a diagnostic instrument and is provided today to raise your awareness about your current self-care experiences. Each of the following statements examine effective physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual and professional methods of staying balanced and preventing compassion fatigue and burnout. The scoring guidelines at the end of the inventory are meant to help you to consider what aspects of your life could benefit from additional attention and self-care.

**Instructions:** In the last month, write the **number** that best fits your experience.

	<b>Physical Self-care</b>	<b>0 Never</b>	<b>1 Rarely</b>	<b>2 Sometimes</b>	<b>3 Often</b>	<b>4 Always</b>
	1. I eat a balanced diet.					
	2. I sleep well and get at least 7 hrs of sleep a night.					
	3. I listen to my body's signals and recognize when I am becoming tired, rundown and prone to illness.					
	4. I do exercise (aerobic, e.g., walking, running, swimming etc) for at least 25 minutes at a time.					
	5. I generally take good vacations (at least one two-week vacation every year).					
	6. I seek preventive healthcare for myself.					
	7. I take time off from work when I am sick.					
	8. I drink at least 1.5 liters (3 pints) of water a day.					
	<i>Add your physical self-care subtotal score here</i>					
	<b>Psychological Self-care</b>	<b>0 Never</b>	<b>1 Rarely</b>	<b>2 Sometimes</b>	<b>3 Often</b>	<b>4 Always</b>
	9. I practice muscle relaxation, yoga, stretching, meditation, mindfulness, or breathing techniques.					
	10. I do something I find creative or expressive (e.g., writing, cooking, gardening etc).					
	11. I set and maintain healthy boundaries by standing up for myself, saying "no" when I need to.					
	12. I write in a journal					
	13. I let others know different aspects of myself.					
	14. I am open-minded and curious.					
	15. I am mindful of decreasing stress in my life.					
	16. I believe in myself and generally give myself positive messages about my ability to accomplish my goals – even when I encounter difficulties.					
	<i>Add your psychological self-care subtotal score here</i>					
	<b>Emotional Self-care</b>	<b>0 Never</b>	<b>1 Rarely</b>	<b>2 Sometimes</b>	<b>3 Often</b>	<b>4 Daily</b>
	17. I am kind to myself.					
	18. I do something I find fun (e.g., play a game, go to a movie, read a book etc).					
	19. I share my feelings with at least one friend or my partner.					
	20. I allow myself to cry when feeling sad.					
	21. I enjoy playing with animals and/or my pets					
	22. There are people who care about me that I trust, to whom I can talk if I want.					
	23. I spend time with people I trust and feel close to.					
	<i>Add your emotional self-care subtotal score here</i>					



 <b>Spiritual self-care</b>	<b>0 Never</b>	<b>1 Rarely</b>	<b>2 Sometimes</b>	<b>3 Often</b>	<b>4 Always</b>
24. I feel good about how I spend my time and energy in relation to what is really important to me in life.					
25. I look for and make meaning from difficult times.					
26. I feel part of a community that has meaning and purpose (e.g., a church or religious group, a group of volunteers, etc.).					
27. I have gratitude.					
28. I find ways to feel close with nature.					
29. I take some time for myself to be quiet, think, meditate, write and/or pray.					
<i>Add your spiritual self-care subtotal score here</i>					
 <b>Workplace or Professional self-care</b>	<b>0 Never</b>	<b>1 Rarely</b>	<b>2 Sometimes</b>	<b>3 Often</b>	<b>4 Always</b>
30. I work for less than ten hours a day.					
31. I feel confident in my ability to address challenging situations with patients and/or clients.					
32. I feel a sense of meaning and enjoyment in work					
33. I have at least one full day off work each week.					
34. I am able to set limits with clients and colleagues.					
35. When I leave work at the end of the day I can disengage and leave the pressures of work behind.					
36. I feel I have the training and skills I need to do my job well.					
37. I have peer support that I can turn to when I'm experiencing work distress.					
<i>Add your workplace self-care subtotal score here</i>					
<b>TOTAL SCORE (add subtotals from 5 self-care categories)</b>					

## Scoring guidelines and suggestions for self-care

**0-37:** A score in this range suggests that your self-care skills and lifestyle balance strategies may be poor, and you could benefit from developing a plan to change your lifestyle and improve your self-care.

**38-75:** A score in this range suggests that your self-care skills and lifestyle balance strategies may need close attention, and you could possibly benefit from developing a plan to improve your self-care.

**76-111:** A score in this range suggests that you may have moderately good self-care skills and lifestyle balance strategies in place.

**112-148:** A score in this range suggests that you may have good self-care skills and lifestyle balance strategies in place.

*Adapted from self-care inventory from Donna D. DiCello, PsyD with permission*

**Exercise 6: Case Video Review**

**Purpose:** To increase awareness to self-care and support opportunities in veterinary practice.

**Task:** Observe the scenarios and note down what you like and what you would do differently.

What I liked	What I would do differently
<b>"Missing Pepe"</b>	
Scene 1	
Scene 2	
<b>"One Last Try"</b>	
Scene 1	
Scene 2	
Scene 3	



## Exercise 6: Create a Self-Care Action Plan for Change

### RATIONALE

It may seem paradoxical to think that your clients and patients will actually receive more compassionate care if you, as the professional devote time in taking care of your own needs first. The “fallout” from not taking care of your own needs may mean that overtime, you become at high risk for feeling depleted, resentful, angry, and may experience many other health-debilitating symptoms. By taking care of your own needs through self-care practice, you are investing in yourself and will have more energy to care for others.

### TASK

1. Review and reflect upon the results of your self-care inventory.
2. Develop a general action plan applicable to you that includes
  - a. Two specific goals from self-care categories (e.g., physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, professional) that you are willing to focus on for lifestyle balance.
  - b. Write down your strategy for reaching your goal
  - c. Identify your resources for keeping you on track with your goal.
3. Working as a team, share your strategies and brainstorm a collective list of strategies that cover several items to create balance and connection.
4. Appoint a team spokesperson who is prepared to share sampling from your list.

# My Self-Care Action Plan for Change



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

➤ **My general action plan:**

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◆ **Specific Goal #1:**

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■ **Strategy for achieving goal #1:**

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■ **My resources (internal and external) to support me in achieving my goal?**

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◆ **Specific Goal #2:**

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■ **Strategy for achieving goal #2:**

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■ **My resources (internal and external) to support me in achieving goal #2?)**

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*“Happiness is when what you think, what you say and what you do are in harmony.”*

*– Mahatma Gandhi*

## Opportunities for Creating a Self-Care Culture for Veterinary Practices

1. **Work to create an emotionally safe environment.** There are many ways to create a culture that acknowledges and supports honest expression of feeling and needs. Create an atmosphere in which reactions to traumatic events or crisis situations with patients and clients are considered normal and inevitable and that all staff are supported and validated.
2. **Build in routine time to connect with staff at the beginning and end of your shift.** This could be a check in at the end of the shift to express something they did during the shift they feel happy about and also something that they feel stressed about. Similarly, coming on to a shift, staff might do a check in to state anything they feel stressed about, any fears or regrets left over from previous shifts, and hopes for their upcoming shift. This kind of "vulnerable sharing" will only work once staff members feel safe sharing. Assuring people that they will not be judged, analyzed, or put down if they share honestly and demonstrating that anything they say will be received with empathy will go a long way in creating emotional safety. This sharing will create community and caring between staff members and will allow a more productive and harmonious setting.
3. **Whenever a stressful situation happens, take a few minutes to debrief.** Use tools of empathic listening when others are sharing and reacting and realize that staff may have differing reactions to the incident. Another helpful measure is to provide regular staff meetings that include case reviews, debriefing, and mutual support, especially for the more distressing cases. It may even be necessary to utilize staff support groups or refer staff to a counselor or psychologist for additional emotional support
4. **Educate staff about communication and compassion fatigue training.** Create visual cues in the practice for easy, ongoing reference and reminder for self-care, and other stress-reduction techniques that are applicable in the workplace.
5. **Think of training as an ongoing process, not a one-time event.** Self-care is something to practice over time. Instituting regular staff training opportunities (in-house) or at local, regional or national conferences will allow staff to learn new tools, advance their skills, talk about the challenges they face and get "recharged". It requires intention, support and practice.
6. **Enforce work ethic that encourages staff to take appropriate breaks.** Provide opportunity for staff to take full lunch breaks away from their work areas.
7. **Ensure that enough staff are available to share the workload.** It is essential to keep the number of hours worked and overall stress at a manageable level for each employee. It may be necessary to discourage staff from taking back-to-back on-call shifts, especially during busy weekend periods. It may be helpful to have a predetermined number of shifts for which each staff member is responsible each month to ensure that a few are not being overburdened.

Adapted from Sears, M (2010), Humanizing Health care.

## Resources / Self-study

Institute for Healthcare Communication, Bayer Communication Project. Accessible from <http://www.healthcarecomm.org/bahcp/bibliographies/bibliographies.php>

Jan 2007 edition *Veterinary Clinics of North America, Small Animal Practice*, 37 (1).

*National Commission on Veterinary Economic Issues Online*. Accessed from <http://www.ncvei.org>

Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project. <http://www.compassionfatigue.org/>

Healthy Caregiving. <http://www.healthycaregiving.com/>

Silverman J, Kurtz, S., & Draper, J. (2005). *Skills for communicating with patients*. (2nd ed.). Oxford: Radcliffe Publishing.

## Training opportunities

Institute for Healthcare Communication  
Bayer Communication Project  
Kathleen Bonvicini, MPH, EdD, Executive Director  
New Haven, CT  
Accessed from <http://www.healthcarecomm.org/bahcp/homepage.php>

International Conference on Communication in Veterinary Medicine. Accessed from <http://www.iccvm.com/>

Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society  
<http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/stress/index.aspx>

SoulCare in HealthCare® “The Relationship is the Medicine”  
Certificate Training Program in Relationship-Centered Healthcare  
Joan Borysenko, PhD, and Gordon Dveirin, EdD  
Accessed through Omega Institute at <http://eomega.org/>

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\*If you would like to attend a communications workshop or to schedule an in-hospital seminar for your healthcare team, visit <http://www.healthcarecomm.org/bahcp> or contact the Institute for Healthcare Communication at 800-800-5907 or [animalhealth@healthcarecomm.org](mailto:animalhealth@healthcarecomm.org).