Compassion Fatigue and Self-Care for Healthcare Professionals

Compassion fatigue and burnout are increasingly common among healthcare professionals since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. One way to counter compassion fatigue is with self-care strategies.

The most insidious aspect of compassion fatigue is that it attacks the very core of what brings helpers into this work: their empathy and compassion for others. Compassion fatigue and burnout can result in the following for individuals:

- health-related problems
- emotional exhaustion
- lack of empathy
- desensitization
- cynicism
- hopelessness

With these potential consequences to organizations:

- loss of productivity
- decrease in job satisfaction
- staff turnover
- poor morale

Potentially in connection with burnout, studies show an increase in alcohol purchasing and consumption since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Isolation, burnout, state laws relaxing alcohol purchase, and inability to readily access support groups are all contributing factors.

Excessive drinking levels are defined as:

- **Women**
  - 8 or more drinks a week
  - 4 or more drinks within 2-3 hours
- **Men**
  - 15 or more drinks a week
  - 5 or more drinks within 2-3 hours
- **Under 21 Pregnant Women**
  - Any alcohol use

Self-care is the antidote to burnout and is about coping with stress and taking proactive steps to enhance resilience and overall well-being.

Develop and implement a self-care plan that includes:

- Exercise
- Creative endeavors
- Spiritual activities
- Nutrition
- Sleep
- Social support

Self-care does not have to be complicated. Try one of these:

- Watch a short video: try kittens, puppies, or a blooper reel from your favorite show
- Sit in nature and watch the clouds
- Take a short walk outside
- Stretch
- Put on some music and dance
- Listen to a guided meditation: there are many free, short meditations online
- Turn off electronics for a set amount of time
- Do a small act of kindness
- Rest your legs up a wall
- Write in a journal: list daily accomplishments, how you are feeling, or what you are grateful for

References:

- American Journal of Orthopsychiatry: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2699394/
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/alcohol-use.htm