Outline

- Compassion Fatigue
- Burnout
- Depression
- Risk for Animal Care Professionals
- Addressing the Problem
  - Seeking Help
  - Prevention

Dictionary Definitions

- **Compassion fatigue**: Fatigue, emotional distress, or apathy resulting from constant demands of caring for others or from constant appeals from charities.
- **Burnout**: Cumulative process; emotional exhaustion and withdrawal associated with increased workload and institutional stress or frustration.
- **Depression**: Mood disorder characterized by persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest; affects how person feels, thinks, behaves; can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems.

Neurobiology of Compassion Fatigue

- Amygdala detect and assess threat
  - Fear response
    - Surge of norepinephrine from locus coeruleus (LC)
    - Cluster of noradrenergic nuclei in brainstem
  - Repeated exposure → Prolonged/Repeated activation → Hypervigilance

Compassion Fatigue

- Can occur suddenly after particularly stressful/traumatic case
  - Become more cynical at work
  - Increased risk of making errors
  - Lose respect for clients, patients, coworkers
  - Contribute to toxic work environment
  - Affect relationships outside of work
Compassion Fatigue in Animal Care Professions

- Euthanasia
- Lack of resources
- Blame by public for problem created by public
  - Negative perceptions of shelter work
- Abuse/ neglect cases
- Bullying
  - Online especially vicious
- Contradictions
  - “Save them all” but “Don’t let them suffer”

Burnout in Animal Care Professions

- Stressful, sometimes dangerous work environment
- Lower pay scales
- Not for Profits
- Long work hours
- Understaffing
- Stress & pressure of providing continuous high level of care
  - Outbreaks, neonates, hoarding
- Disillusionment/ disconnect between job expectation and reality

Depression

- Experience lack of interest in or loss of enjoyment of daily activities
  - Occurring longer than two weeks
- Impact daily life or work
  - Could include:
    - Change in appetite or weight
    - Change in sleep patterns
    - Decreased energy
    - Feelings of worthlessness
    - Difficulty concentrating
    - Increased irritability
    - Suicidal thoughts
- More than sad

Depression in Animal Care Professions

- Compassion fatigue symptoms unrecognized or not addressed effectively
- Can lead to depression, other mental and physical illnesses
- Work as helping professional can make person with history of depression more vulnerable to compassion fatigue (Dolce 2014)

Depression in Veterinary Medicine

- Serious psychological distress
  - Prevalence veterinarians = general population
    - Younger veterinarians % higher
  - Factors
    - Working longer hours, especially evenings
    - Financial worry
    - Student debt
  - Still only 50% getting help
    - 2018 Executive Summary from Merck Animal Health Veterinary Wellbeing Study JAVMA

Depression

- Genetics, learned behavior, environment, stressful life event, chronic stress
  - Often a combination
- 1 in 5 suffer from mental illness annually
  - US and Canada
    - 42.5 million adults (US)
      - U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) 2014
      - 50% of those with major depression don’t seek help
Suicide Statistics

- 1,000,000,000 die by suicide annually each year worldwide (Platt 2012)
- US: 13.0 deaths per 100,000 people (2014)
  - Highest rate in 28 years
- Canada: 11.5 deaths per 100,000 people
- Suicide kills as many people as breast cancer (AFSP 2014)
- 85% of us will be touched by the suicide of someone close to us sometime in our life

Suicide Statistics in Animal Care Professions

- Veterinarians, physicians, nurses, pharmacists, dentists significantly higher risk than general population
  - Veterinarians four times risk of general population
  - Veterinarians two times risk of other medical professionals
- Similar findings in several countries
  - UK, Australia, Belgium, Norway, USA
- Animal control workers
  - Increased risk for work place suicide
  - Protective Service Occupations 5.3/1,000,000
  - National rate 1.5/1,000,000

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Why are Animal Care Professions at Increased Risk?

- High level stigma for mental illness and seeking treatment
- Work related stressors
  - Abuse, neglect, critical care
  - Negative perception of shelter work
- Increase ease of complaints/ liability
  - Against license
  - Online bullying
- Lack of readily accessible resources
- Extreme need for confidentiality

Why is Veterinary Medicine at Increased Risk?

- Schematic representation of a hypothetical model to explain the risk of suicide in veterinary surgeons.
  - D. J. Bartram, and D. S. Baldwin Veterinary Record 2008;162:36-40

Why are Animal Care Professions at Increased Risk?

- When we break a bone: When we get a bad cut:
  - Sign my cast!
  - Check it out, 12 stitches!

- When we get the flu: When we struggle with mental health issues:
  - Jimmy MacKibbs
  - Hey
Why are Animal Care Professions at Increased Risk?

- Euthanasia
  - Frequently exposed to death - stressful
  - Frequent exposure to concept of death
    - Less fearful of death
  - Knowledge of and access to lethal drugs
- Witte 2012
  - Students exposed to euthanasia more frequently were less fearful of death
  - Did not apply to necropsy or surgery

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What Can We Do About It?

- Compassion fatigue (Dobbs 2014)
  - Happens to us all at some point
    - Occupational hazard
  - Recognize and acknowledge it
    - Learn to manage symptoms
    - Make access to resources confidential and easy
  - Set up and encourage prevention strategies

What Can We Do About It?

- Neuroplasticity
  - Makes recovery and resilience possible
- Self-regulation
  - Being able to accurate perceive and respond to suffering without losing sense of safety and self

What Can We Do About It?

- Resilience
  - Level of health to help one recover quickly
  - Maintain focus and clarity rather than be overwhelmed
  - Preserve sense of meaning and purpose despite adversity
  - Maintain positive perspective; recover from negative emotions

Six Dimensions of Wellness

- Physical
- Cognitive
- Emotional
- Spiritual
- Intellectual
- Social

Hettler 2016: National Institute of Wellness
Wellbeing Dimensions

- Started out with 6, then 7
- Newest resource has 9!
- AVMA 100 Healthy Tips to Support a Culture of Wellbeing

What Can We Do About It?

- Identifying and addressing it in ourselves helps entire work team
  - Compassion Fatigue self-test
  - Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQuol)
  - Empath Test
    - Figley & Stamm
  - Canadian Mental Health Association
    - https://cmha.ca/mental-health-meter
  - Umatter Wellness Assessment

Recognize and Acknowledge

- Employee Assistance Programs
  - Rare
  - Offer regular assessments
  - Inform new members about possibility upon hire
    - Similar to informing about bites
  - Practices with:
    - Improved mental health
    - Increased production
    - More profitable

What Can We Do About It?

- Interactive Screening Program
  - https://www.afsp.org/the-interactive-screening-program
  - Adopted by organization (school or business)
  - Students/staff able to take anonymous online self-check questionnaire
  - Processed through system to assess person's level of risk

What Can We Do About It?

- Organizational resources
  - AVMA, CVMA
  - State, Provincial VMAs
    - Lack of awareness (10-14% of surveyed)
    - <50% found them useful
  - EAPs and Organizational resources can be improved upon
What Can We Do About It?

Interactive Screening Program
- https://www.afsp.org/the-interactive-screening-program

Personal connection
- Counselor reviews answers, provides an individualized response, provides opportunity for anonymous online dialogue
- Through dialogue, able to build a relationship, offer reassurance, connect individuals to help needed

Unique program
- Able to reach those that might not seek help on their own
  - Embarrassment, cost concern, not aware of services available, too depressed or overwhelmed to reach out

QPR
- Question…
  - a person about suicide
  - If you’re wondering if you should ask, the person has probably considered suicide
- Persuade…
  - a person to get help
  - Most important thing to do is to listen
- Refer…
  - the person to the appropriate resource
  - Ideal to go with person to seek help
- Not counseling, don’t need to be a professional
- CPR for mental health emergency
  - www.qprinstitute.com/about.html

Social worker or mental health professional
- Stress management plan
- Coping strategies

Financial planner
- Manage student debt, living expenses

Healthy living activities
- Yoga, meditation, volunteering, travel, religious services, socializing with friends, hobbies, reading, exercising, family time
- Limit social media time

We can help each other
- Create a culture of wellness
  - Recognize value of taking time for self-care
    - As important as taking care of the needs of others
  - If don’t care for self, have nothing left to give those around you

Healthy living activities
- Yoga, meditation, volunteering, travel, religious services, socializing with friends, hobbies, reading, exercising, family time

Awareness
- Become more informed
  - Prevalence and causes of mental illness, psychological distress
- Be conscious of stigma of seeking professional help
  - Awareness of what we say and do
  - Avoid lazy labeling of mental illness
- Getting professional help is an act of self-care
  - Self-care is critical to doing effective, ethical, sustainable and JOYFUL work (Dolce 2014)
What Can We Do About It?

- Low Impact Debriefing
  - [https://compassionfatigue.ca/low-impact-debriefing-how-to-stop-sliming-each-other/](https://compassionfatigue.ca/low-impact-debriefing-how-to-stop-sliming-each-other/)
  - A way to discuss stressful events (venting) without inadvertently damaging or traumatizing person confided in

What Can the Animal Care Professions Do About It?

- Communication
  - The Public - open, transparent, non-reactionary
  - Staff/ Volunteers - active listening, conflict resolution
  - Family/ Friends

- Coping
  - At home - self care, hobbies
  - On job - debriefing, decision making SOPs, staff involvement in process, celebrations and counseling
  - In the community - sharing population data - successes and challenges, mobilize community to help

What Can We Do About It?

- 1. Take care of yourself - seek help if struggling
- 2. Recognize that perfection is neither attainable nor healthy motivator
- 3. Recognize asking for help shows strength and courage, not weakness
- 4. Take a risk and reach out if you suspect someone is struggling
- 5. Make mental health and well-being education a mandatory component of training
- 6. Demand acceptance and support of those seeking help for mental health struggles

Conclusions

- Compassion fatigue is a common problem in animal care professions
- Stress, compassion fatigue and burnout can lead to depression
- There is something you can do.
- Your life matters. You do not need to earn the right to take care of yourself. (Dolce 2014)
- You can help those around you, both individually and as an organization
- Prevention is worth saving a life!

Resources- Suicide

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
- American Association of Suicidology
- Alliance of Hope for Suicide Survivors
  - [http://www.allianceofhope.org/alliance-of-hope-for-survivors/support-groups.html](http://www.allianceofhope.org/alliance-of-hope-for-survivors/support-groups.html)
- Suicide Awareness Voices of Education

Resources- Wellness

- AVMA Wellness Resources
  - [https://www.avma.org/ProfessionalDevelopment/Personal/PeerAndWellness/Pages/wellness-links.aspx](https://www.avma.org/ProfessionalDevelopment/Personal/PeerAndWellness/Pages/wellness-links.aspx)
- CVMA Wellness Resources
  - [https://www.canadianveterinarians.net/veterinarians-health-and-wellness-resources](https://www.canadianveterinarians.net/veterinarians-health-and-wellness-resources)
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
  - [https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help)
Resources - Assessments

- National Wellness Institute
  - https://www.nationalwellness.org/page/Six_Dimensions
- Canadian Mental Health Association Mental Health Meter
  - https://cmha.ca/mental-health-meter
- UMatter Wellness Assessment

References/ Resources

- When Helping Hurts: Compassion Fatigue in the Veterinary Profession. Kathleen Ayl, PsyD
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- UMatter

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Thank You for Your Time!

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