“Reinventing Your Practice: Less Stress - More Vibrancy”

Focusing on HOW we do what we do.

Robynn Moraites
Executive Director
NC Lawyer Assistance Program

TRAINING OBJECTIVES

• Gain an understanding of what compassion fatigue is
• Understand the signs and symptoms
• Understand the contributing factors
• Understand best practices for prevention and mitigation of compassion fatigue

Lawyers are Human Beings

Fill in the blanks...

• The world is a _____ place.
• Life is _____.
• I am _____ as a human being.
• I want to change _____ about my job.
• I want to change _____ about myself.
• Most often I feel _____.

Compassion Fatigue Defined

• The cumulative physical/ emotional/psychological effects of continual exposure to traumatic or distressing stories/events
• When working in a helping capacity
• Where demands outweigh resources
Doing...

• Too much
• For too long
• With too few resources
• And working with the big uglies in life

Factors that Influence a Person’s Vulnerability to Compassion Fatigue

- Individual Factors
- Life Situation Factors
- Organizational Factors

Compassion Fatigue Advisory...

- Any person regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, age, occupation... develop this condition
- Doesn’t imply weakness, just “human-ness”
- Is more about “dis-ease” than disease.

Typical Attorney Workload

Our ideal employee can function without sleep while working a 120 hour week. And is, of course, highly family oriented.
**Workload: Look & Feel Familiar?**

Statistically significant correlation with CF

**Individual Vulnerabilities and Life Situations**

- History of or current trauma
- Health problems
- Alcohol or drug use/troubles
- Poor job performance
- Depression or anxiety
- Generic life problems:
  - Spouse/partner,
  - Children,
  - Parents
  - Finances

**Organizational Stressors**

- Unrealistic expectations
- Unrecognized accomplishments
- Budget cuts
- Eliminating positions
- Performing multiple jobs
- Personalities and politics
- Intense competition (within and without)

**Client Expectations/Stressors**

- Unrealistic
- Want it now
- Unhappy, sad, mad, frustrated
- Stress from the pressure
- Stress from the difficult material being reviewed and the workload yet expected to appear and be completely unaffected by it (i.e. not be human)

**Competitive nature of stress**

*SOMETIMES I FEEL THAT I HAVE THE WORST JOB IN THE WORLD.*

*[YA... RIGHT?]*
**Lawyering ~ an At Risk Profession Seems to Imply that it is hard.**

- 1990 Johns Hopkins study ranked lawyers first in experiencing depression
- Job dissatisfaction data doubled from 1984 data
- 44% of lawyers feel they don't have enough time with families
- 54% feel they don't have enough time for themselves
- Studies show higher incidence of MI and Alcohol and other Drug problems compared to the general population

**Balancing Act for Lawyers**

- Pessimism works in the professional world but not in the interpersonal world

**Symptoms Reported**

- Intrusive thoughts
- Anger/anxiety/fear
- Sleep disturbance
- Fatigue
- Loss of Appetite
- Loss of empathy
- Loss of faith in humanity
- Sense of isolation from others
- Physical complaints

**Role of Mirror Neurons in the Brain**

- Source: Vrhelkovi et al. (2008) and Levin et al. (2003) and Jaffe et al. (2006)

**Empathy**

- Experience the experiences of someone else (Shane, 2008)
- Enduring those same experiences and emotions (Lydialey Gibson)
- Empathy is involuntary: a shared emotion; this is hardwired into the brain (L. Gibson)
- Human beings who spend time with other human beings who are empathetic tend to feel better
Brain Chemistry

- Reptilian Brain (instincts)
- Limbic Brain (emotion, memory)
- Frontal Lobe (reason)

These work together, while we think, something else is going on.

The Fight or Flight Response

Stress: Portrait of a Killer

This movie sheds wonderful insight into the propagation of illness in today's society via the inner workings of the human stress response.

Impact on Primary Assumptions

- The World is Benevolent
- The World is Meaningful
- The Self is Worthy

Source: Bulman, Shattered Assumptions

Impact of Continual Exposure...

- Shattered assumptions about basic beliefs in our world for safety, security, trust, justice
- The world is not a good place, there is no meaning; pessimism, depression, irritability, sickness
- Heightened awareness of vulnerability and the fragility of life-increased anxiety/anger/...
"I think this happens to everyone whether they admit or not or show it or not. It is inevitable with that kind of caseload that one will at least at times go bonkers. This wears on all of us and on some of us more than others. We see colleagues severely affected all the time. I think the practice leaves scars. Some make it better than others, obviously, but everyone suffers......"

—criminal lawyer

Source: NCLAP Program permission granted

"Cases of horrible, sexual, predatory exploitation of children haunt me. I keep my balance and my job as a judge by profoundly guarding myself against being swept away by the gruesome evidence I have to confront."

Zimmerman, (2002). Trauma and Judges. Canadian Bar Association

---

Powerlessness

Indecisive/Anxious

Alienate from others

The world is a _____ place.

Life is _____.

I am _____ as a human being.

I want to change _____ about my job.

I want to change _____ about myself.

Most often I feel _____.

---

So slow, is it even moving?

That which is to give light must endure burning.....

Victor Frankl
Rather Slow and Insidious... then increases... then overwhelming....

Visible Results

- Strong correlation with what is known as "Disruptive Behavior"
  - Intimidation, Anger and Lashing Out
- At opposing counsel
- At support staff
- At associates
- "Kick the dog" syndrome
- Spouse/partner and kids take the brunt of the frustration
- Enter the grievance and discipline process

Most common client complaints & grievance notices

- Lack of communication
- Apathy (improper advocacy)
- Lack of Diligence
- i.e. “I just don’t care anymore.”

Uh-Oh

The Two Big Uglies

- Workload/Hours
- Trauma Exposure
Who most at risk?

- Criminal or family law attorneys/judges
- High caseloads; long work hours
- High % exposure to graphic evidence, 911 tapes, photos, videotapes, victim impact statements
- Serving clients who have high levels of distress
- Little if any education on the subject of CF
- Little support from peers-isolation

There is Hope for all of us...

Mitigating Compassion Fatigue for Lawyers

- Individual
- Professional
- Societal
- Awareness, Balance and Connection (Jaffe, et al.)

Insuring fitness to practice.....

The things that cause the things
that cause the things.....

Organizational Contributions to Compassion Fatigue

- Heavy caseloads-Long Hours
- Inefficient administration
- Excessive paperwork
- Inadequate resources to meet the demands
- Lack of supportive supervision

Source: Levin et al. (2003), Osofsky et al. (2008)

Talking and Connections Help the Brain

What Individuals Can Do
Emotional triggers are events or personality types that cause an intense emotional response.

- Different for each one of us
- Examples:
  - Double Bind
  - Abuse of vulnerable populations
  - Disrespect from colleagues/judges/clients/people
  - Unfair, unjust realities of life and the system
  - The line at your door

What are yours?

Anger, Depression, withdrawal
Anxiety; work harder
Stop caring, looks like burnout but is really a defense mechanism
Physical complaints, headaches, stomach problems, back pain, fatigue
Coping mechanisms that hurt more than help

Recognize the risks for yourself
Find a way to debrief distressing material
Work on self awareness every day
Take an inventory of how balanced your life is—be intentional about balancing it out
Evaluate your tension reducing behaviors
Be intentional about protecting yourself

How Many are You Spinning?...
Becoming Happier

• Spin fewer plates: Squeeze in less.

• It is the obvious:
  Sleep
  Exercise
  Eat

• Don’t deny negative emotions [fear, sadness, anxiety] – move toward them and accept them.

• Identify and speak with a close person (or people) who you trust to share your internal experience.

• It is not state of status or bank account – “state of mind” is what matters most.

• While we may be paid well, money does not trigger the mirror neuron stimulus we (all humans) need to translate into better emotional health in our bodies and psyches.

• What do you do at the end of the day to transition out of work? If nothing, admit that. Then change it.

• Intersect pleasure and meaning → interests are central.

• Express Gratitude
• Try making a gratitude list every morning of 3 things you are grateful for. Do it for a few months and see what you notice. It will change your life.

Adapted from T. Ben–Shahar

Express Gratitude

Thank you!
First Self Assessment Exercise

Observe the work that you do. Does it have:

- A large volume of demand (and often increasing demands, such as more and more clients to see or more and more paperwork to do)?
- Continually dwindling resources?
- Exposure to difficult stories of loss, pain, death and suffering?
- Do you work with clients who face seemingly insurmountable obstacles, have chronic needs or even clients who get worse rather than get better?

All of these elements can contribute to compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma.

Ask yourself the four following questions:

1) Where do the stories go?

What do you do at the end of a work day to put difficult client stories away and go home to your friends and family?

2) Were you trained for this?

Did your training offer you an education on self care, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma or burnout? If it did, how up to date are you on those strategies? If it didn't, which is still true for the majority of us over a certain age, how much do you know about these concepts?

This sheet may be freely copied as long as (a) this box is left intact on the handout, (b) the author is credited, (c) no changes are made, and (d) it is not sold. Please be advised that compassion fatigue can lead to serious problems such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. The information contained on this sheet is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice.

Copyright 2008 by Françoise Mathieu, www.compassionfatigue.ca
3) **What are your particular vulnerabilities?**

Two things we know for sure about the field of helping: one, that a large percentage of helpers have experienced primary trauma at some point in their past, which may have led them to being attracted to the field in the first place. Two, that personality types who are attracted to the field of helping (rather than, say, mechanical engineering) are more likely to feel highly attuned and empathy towards others, which makes them good at their job and also more vulnerable to developing CF, VT and Burnout.

4) **How do you protect yourself while doing this very challenging work?**
Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma – Signs and Symptoms

Physical Signs and Symptoms
- Exhaustion
- Insomnia
- Headaches
- Increased susceptibility to illness
- Somatization and hypochondria

Behavioral Signs and Symptoms
- Increased use of alcohol and drugs
- Absenteeism
- Anger and Irritability
- Avoidance of clients
- Impaired ability to make decisions
- Problems in personal relationships
- Attrition
- Compromised care for clients
- The Silencing Response
- Depleted parenting

Psychological signs and symptoms
- Emotional exhaustion
- Distancing
- Negative self image
- Depression
- Sadness, Loss of hope
- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Reduced ability to feel sympathy and empathy
- Cynicism
- Resentment
- Dread of working with certain clients
- Feeling professional helplessness
- Diminished sense of enjoyment/career
- Depersonalization/numbness
- Disruption of world view/ heightened anxiety or irrational fears
- Inability to tolerate strong feelings
- Problems with Intimacy
- Intrusive imagery – preoccupation with trauma
- Hypersensitivity to emotionally charged stimuli
- Insensitivity to emotional material
- Difficulty separating personal and professional lives
- Failure to nurture and develop non work related aspects of life

EVALUATING YOUR CONTRIBUTING FACTORS:

Assess the following elements with this continuum in mind: Annoying — Distressing — Traumatic

**Nature of the work, the cases and the workplace; in your role:**
- what events, incidents, cases, stories are the most difficult? Why?
- how much control do you have over your schedule?
- does this schedule work for you; can you adequately negotiate your workload?
- how has the workload changed over the years?
- do your work tasks vary from day to day; do you like the work you do;
- are you sufficiently trained to do the work you do?
- how much support do you have; is supervision adequate; helpful; supportive?

**Nature of the clientele; in your role:**
- how many clients do you have contact with each day?
- do you have variety with the types of clients you work with?
- what types of clients are the most difficult for you and why?
- how do your clients treat you?
- are you ever afraid of your clients? — ever been harmed by a client?
- how do you treat your clients?

**Nature of the worker; for you personally:**
- how well suited are you personally for the work you do?
- how well does the work you do match your values and beliefs?
- what does your current stress index look like on a scale of 1 (no stress) to 10 (extreme stress)?
- can you identify the factors in your life that produce the most stress?
- what coping mechanisms do you use to manage or decrease stress?
- do you have supportive interpersonal relationships?
- do you engage in a hobby or leisure activity every week?

**Nature of the social/cultural context: in your role:**
- what are the social obstacles to doing your work? (funding cuts, furlough days etc)
- how are you received within the community based on the work that you do and the work of your organization; do you feel respected?
- what does the community say about the clientele you serve?
- what effect, if any, does the above have upon you personally?

WHAT’S ON YOUR PLATE?
**SELF CARE INVENTORY** (Reprinted with permission)
Mark “X” for what you already do. Mark “O” for what you wish you did more often.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Self-Care</th>
<th>Psychological Self-Care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>___ Eat Regularly (e.g. breakfast, lunch, and dinner)</td>
<td>___ Notice your inner experience – listen to your thoughts, judgments, beliefs, attitudes and feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Eat healthily</td>
<td>___ Let others know different aspects of you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Exercise</td>
<td>___ Engage your intelligence in a new area (e.g. go to an art museum, history exhibit, sports event, auction, theater performance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Get regular medical care for prevention</td>
<td>___ Practice receiving from others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Get medical care when needed</td>
<td>___ Be curious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Take time off when sick</td>
<td>___ Say no to extra responsibilities sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Get massages</td>
<td>___ Other:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Dance, swim, walk, run, play sports, sing, or do some other physical activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that is fun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Take time to be sexual – with yourself, with a partner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Get enough sleep</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Wear clothes you like</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Take vacations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Take day trips or mini-vacations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Make time away from telephones</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Other:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Self-Care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>___ Spend time with others whose company you enjoy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Stay in contact with important people in your life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Give yourself affirmations, praise yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Love yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Reread favorite books, re-view favorite movies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Identify comforting activities, objects, people, relationships, places, and seek them out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Allow yourself to cry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Find things that make you laugh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Express your outrage in social action, letters, donations, marches, protests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Play with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Other:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This sheet may be freely copied as long as (a) this box is left intact on the handout, (b) the author is credited, (c) no changes are made, and (d) it is not sold. Please be advised that compassion fatigue can lead to serious problems such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. The information contained on this sheet is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice.

*Copyright 2008 by Françoise Mathieu, www.compassionfatigue.ca*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Spiritual Self-Care</strong></th>
<th><strong>Workplace or Professional Self-Care</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>___ Make time for reflection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Spend time with nature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Find a spiritual connection or community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Be open to inspiration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Cherish your optimism and hope</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Be aware of non-material aspects of life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Try at times not to be in charge or the expert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Be open to not knowing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Identify what you is meaningful to you and notice its place in your life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Meditate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Pray</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Sing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Spend time with children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Have experiences of awe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Contribute to causes in which you believe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Read inspirational literature (e.g. talks, music)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Other:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| ___ Take a break during the work day (e.g. lunch) |
| ___ Take time to chat with co-workers |
| ___ Make quiet time to complete tasks |
| ___ Identify projects or tasks that are exciting and rewarding |
| ___ Set limits with clients and colleagues |
| ___ Balance your caseload so no one day or part of a day is “too much.” |
| ___ Arrange your work space so it is comfortable and comforting |
| ___ Get regular supervision or consultation |
| ___ Negotiate for your needs (benefits, pay raise) |
| ___ Have a peer support group |
| ___ Develop a non-trauma area of professional interest |
| ___ Other: |

**Balance:**

| ___ Strive for balance with your work life and work day |
| ___ Strive for balance among work, family, relationships, play and rest |

Adapted from *Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization* by Karen W. Saakvitne & Laurie Anne Pearlman. Copyright (c) 1996 by the Traumatic Stress Institute/Center for Adult & Adolescent Psychotherapy. Used by permission of W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

This sheet may be freely copied as long as (a) this box is left intact on the handout, (b) the author is credited, (c) no changes are made, and (d) it is not sold. Please be advised that compassion fatigue can lead to serious problems such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. The information contained on this sheet is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice.

Copyright 2008 by Françoise Mathieu, www.compassionfatigue.ca
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developing a Compassion Fatigue Protection Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What components will go into my plan?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are my warning signs and symptoms?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who will I check in with to hold me accountable or to cue me?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What things do I have control over in my life?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will I relieve stress in a way that works for me? (Intervention)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What stress prevention/reduction strategies will I use? (Prevention)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Francoise Mathieu: Compassion Fatigue Train the Trainer Workbook (2008)
Commitment to Changes I could make in the next…

Week:

Month:

Year:
Mitigating Compassion Fatigue
EVALUATION FORM

Date of Program: ____________

☐ Support/Clerical  ☐ Investigator  ☐ CSS  ☐ Attorney  ☐ Other: ____________  ☐ Manager

Directions: Read each of the statements and rank your understanding of the issue before and after you participated in the Mitigating Compassion Fatigue program. Circle the appropriate number using the following range:
1 = no understanding
4 = little understanding
6 = moderate understanding
8 = quite a bit of understanding
10 = almost complete understanding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How would you describe your understanding of the following?</th>
<th>My understanding before the program.</th>
<th>My understanding after the program.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The definition of compassion fatigue</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The brain’s role in compassion fatigue</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Your own personal level of compassion fatigue</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What factors contribute to your compassion fatigue</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Actions we can take as an office to decrease compassion fatigue</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Actions you can take individually to decrease your compassion fatigue</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What overall rating would you give the Mitigating Compassion Fatigue program?
Excellent            Very Good           Good           Fair           Poor
Explain Briefly:

What do you think was the most successful part of the experience?

What do you think was the least successful part of the experience?

Are there any compassion fatigue questions or related topics you would like to learn more about?

Do you have suggestions we can take as an agency to reduce the risks of compassion fatigue?

Thank you for taking the time to evaluate this program.