

Prioritizing Yourself: A Look into Veterinary Burnout and Compassion Fatigue

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Outline

- Recognition of mental distress in veterinary medicine
- Describe burnout; primary types and suggested causes
- Compassion fatigue; compassion stress vs. exhaustion
- Explain the importance of burnout and compassion fatigue
- Clinical signs of burnout vs. compassion fatigue
- Diagnosis of burnout or compassion fatigue
- Prevention of compassion fatigue
- Resources

Disclaimer

As a Licensed Veterinary Technician and Certified Compassion Fatigue Professional, I feel I have a first look at the mental stress that we experience daily; **however, I am not a credentialed mental health counselor.**

What I can offer you are helpful resources, better insight/mindful practicing tips to better your mental help. Most importantly, I can be your listening ear and your safe zone.

Mental Distress in Veterinary Medicine

- In 2017, Merck Animal Health released an inaugural veterinary wellbeing study.
- From this study it was determined,
- Psychological distress is more prevalent in the veterinary career than average rates of the general population
- Younger veterinarians were the most at risk in veterinary medicine.
- At least 41% of responders would NOT recommend the profession to love ones.

Special Report

Executive summary of the Merck Animal Health Veterinary Wellbeing Study

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Mental Distress in Veterinary Medicine

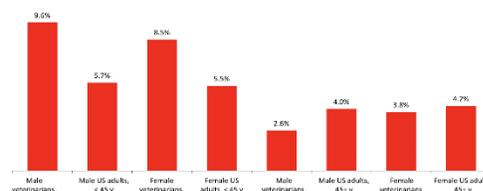


Figure 4—Prevalence of serious psychological distress (defined as a Kessler Psychological Distress score ≥ 13 on a scale from 0 to 24) among respondents to the MAH Study, categorized on the basis of gender and age, and employed US adults in the PSD. For each gender/age pair, prevalence of serious psychological distress was different between veterinarians and employed US adults, except for female veterinarians ≥ 45 years of age versus female US adults ≥ 45 years of age.

Mental Distress in Veterinary Medicine

- In 2020, the Merck Animal Health Veterinary Wellbeing study statistics showed roughly the same in comparison to the 2017 study
- However, there was a slight improvement of attitude on seeking help for mental distress
- In 2021, during the pandemic, the study revealed closely the same statistics.
- In this study it showed the addition to mental distress in veterinary staff, which revealed a higher rate than veterinarians.

Burnout

- Burnout is a psychological syndrome emerging as a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors within the workplace.

Two primary types of burnout:

- Meaning burnout
when the call of caring for others no longer has meaning.
- Caring Burnout
the decreased ability to be professionally attached.

Suggested causes of Burnout:

- Work overload
- Lack of control
- Insufficient Recognition/Reward
- Poor Workplace Relationships
- Lack of Fairness
- Values of Conflict
- Ethical/Moral Dilemmas

Burnout Symptoms:

- Feeling exhausted or drained
- Frequent or chronic illnesses
- Feeling of failure or helplessness
- Lack of self-worth
- Withdrawal
- Isolation

- Disassociation
- Irritability or easily frustrated with oneself/others
- Frequent absence from work or late/leaving early
- Self-harm or intrusive thoughts
- Abuse of food, drugs, alcohol, etc.

Compassion Fatigue

- Also known as vicarious trauma or secondary traumatic stress.
- Compassion fatigue is the emotional, mental, or spiritual distress in those providing care to others. It is mostly associated with caregivers who continuously “take on others’ burden.”

Secondary Traumatic Stress

- The sympathetic nervous system is firing at all ends.
- Due to the increased stress the body’s instinct is to enter “fight or flight” mode.
- Another way to look at this is “arousal” vs. “avoidance”

Compassion Stress vs. Compassion Exhaustion

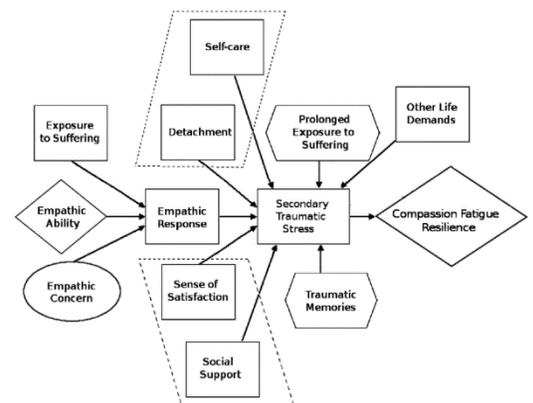
- Compassion Stress- is the demand to be compassionate and efficient
- Compassion Exhaustion- is the constant need and heightened stress levels associated with your job.

Compassion Fatigue Symptoms:

- Anxiety
- Feeling tired or lack of sleep
- Hypervigilance
- Difficulty concentrating
- Lack of self-care
- Poor hygiene
- Illnesses or weakened immunity
- Increased negativity or apathy

Figley’s Model for Predicting and Preventing Compassion Fatigue

- The initial response to the emotional trigger leads to secondary traumatic stress. Prolonged exposure to this



suffering or emotional distress will lead to compassion fatigue.

Self-Evaluation

- **Self-Awareness**
 - Define “the why”
 - Personality Assessment
 - Myers-Briggs
 - Enneagram
 - Perfectionism
 - Too often it is easy for veterinary professionals to be “perfectionists”
 - Recognizing negative and positive “perfectionist” tendencies.
 - Opportunities for growth such as delegation, trustworthy staff, etc.

Self-Evaluation

- **Developing your personal identity**
 - Most of the time, people in caring roles take on the role of “caregiver” as their identity.
 - Identity:
 - is based on experience, interests, values, personality, and beliefs.
 - i.e. Religious views, morals, family, quality of time/work, personal growth, background, etc.

Self-Evaluation

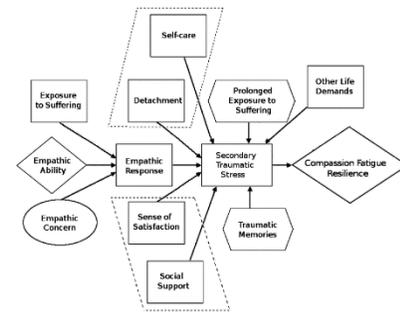
- **Emotional Intelligence**
 - Ability to recognize and regulate emotions
 - Consider the 6 core emotions; Joy, Sadness, Fear, Anger, Disgust, and Surprise.

ProQul Compassion Fatigue Assessment

- [ProQOL Measure | ProQOL](#)

Figley's Model for Predicting and Preventing Compassion Fatigue

- Ways to prevent compassion fatigue as discussed in this model



Detachment

- Setting professional and personal boundaries
 - Adding a clear boundary for your coworkers, clients, etc.
 - Discussion for success with your supervisors
- Knowing your worth
 - Taking pride in your experience and your skill
- Set Expectations for yourself
- Stepping away
 - Taking a step back to stressful situations
 - Exploring new fields of medicine
 - Leaving the profession

Sense of Satisfaction

- Praise and Reward
 - Develop how you like to receive praise
 - Show praise to other
- Self-Help Goals
- Task lists

Social Support

- Coworkers
 - Fostering a good working relationships
- Family
 - Open communication with family

- Friends
- Mentorship
 - One on one guided mentorship programs
 - Involvement in technical organization
 - Accountability partnerships

Self-Care

- 8 Types of Self Care:
 - Physical
 - Emotional
 - Financial
 - Professional
 - Personal
 - Spiritual
 - Social
 - Environmental
- Basic Self Care Needs:
 - Sleep
 - Exercise
 - Nutrition

Self-Care Emergency Cards

1. 4 count breathing technique or pressure point therapy
2. Count from 10 slowly
3. Step away, if needed
4. Drink water/caffeine or eat a snack.
5. Call friend or husband

Organizational Ways to Prevent Burnout

- Acknowledging the problem
- Harness leadership power
- Implement targeted interventions
- Build workplace community
- Promote flexibility

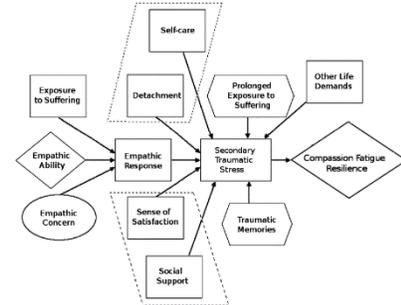
- Promote work-life integration
- Provide wellbeing resources

Figley’s Model for Predicting and Preventing Compassion Fatigue

- The prolonged exposure of STS also leads to resiliency.

Resiliency

- This is determined as the ability to “bounce back”
- Resilience is a skill. With practice skills can be perfected.
- But with any development of a skill, there is the potential for setbacks or challenges.



Mental Distress in Veterinary Medicine

According to our most recent and ongoing Veterinary Wellbeing Study from Merck Animal Health:

- There has been an increase in satisfaction and pride for their work (80% believing their work has positive impacts.)
- Results have indicated there is a higher rate of positive conversations about mental wellbeing in the workplace
- There is a 38% rate of employers offering more mental wellbeing resources, such as Employee Assistance Programs. This is an increase compared to previous studies, 2017, 2019, 2021.

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[Merck Animal Health's Fourth Veterinary Wellbeing Study Indicates Progress in Addressing Mental Health Challenges Among Veterinary Teams](#)

More veterinary professionals are provided access to and are pursuing mental health resources for their overall wellbeing with continued improvements on the horizon

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Resources for Mental Health

