

Lecture summaries

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Compassion Fatigue in the Veterinary Professional

Compassion fatigue produces profound emotional, physical, and psychological exhaustion experienced by veterinary professionals due to chronic exposure to suffering, death, difficult clients, and emotionally charged environments. Unlike ordinary stress or burnout, compassion fatigue stems from sustained empathic engagement and can lead to numbness, anger, guilt, interpersonal conflict, and even increased suicide risk. Research shows more than half of veterinary professionals experience it. Contributors also include euthanasia decisions, client grief, financial conflicts, and repeated trauma exposure. If left unaddressed, compassion fatigue can adversely affect relationships, job performance, and well-being. Effective treatment requires emotional processing, self-care, and supportive individual and workplace interventions.

Learning goals:

1. Understand the Concept of Compassion Fatigue: Participants will be able to define compassion fatigue, distinguish it from stress and burnout, and describe its emotional, physical, and behavioral symptoms.
2. Identify Contributing Factors: Participants will learn to identify workplace conditions, client interactions, and situational stressors that increase vulnerability to compassion fatigue among veterinary practitioners.
3. Recognize the Impact on Professional and Personal Functioning: Participants will understand how compassion fatigue affects job performance, decision-making, interpersonal relationships, and overall well-being, including its connection to elevated suicide risk in the profession.
4. Develop Awareness of Early Warning Signs: Participants will be able to recognize early symptoms of compassion fatigue in themselves and colleagues to promote timely intervention and reduce long-term consequences.
5. Explore Effective Prevention and Treatment Strategies: Participants will evaluate evidence-based self-care practices, workplace supports, and therapeutic interventions designed to reduce compassion fatigue and enhance resilience in veterinary settings.