

# The psychological effects of compassion fatigue in the veterinary field



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**There are many reasons why veterinary professionals dedicate their lives to caring and nursing animals back to health, according to DeNayer “ we work in the only medical field where we see our patients from womb to tomb” (DeNayer, 2014). That in itself says a lot about the emotional effects that can be experienced through compassion fatigue in workplace, caring for patients, creating a special connection with every one of them watching as they successfully recover and also when their health starts to decline, they are with them through it all. Compassion fatigue in the veterinary field is an emotional, mental, and physical feeling of exhaustion that accumulates over time due to the compassionate nature of our job. Many veterinary professionals suffer from this secondary traumatic stress, but how can a workplace train staff to identify when coworkers are showing symptoms of compassion fatigue? More importantly, what are the potential triggers or causes and how one help treat and cope with this feeling and prevent it in the work environment? Most people believe veterinary professionals play with puppies and kittens all day, what they don’t know are the difficult cases that are seen throughout the day and how it eventually could even take a toll on one.**

What are the psychological affects of compassion fatigue to the veterinary professional? The pressures of the work environment can affect one physically and mentally, it can range from the client’s demands and expectations to working overtime to make sure a patient gets all the treatment and care they need after a long, hard day. “ Workplace and occupational stress is an area that has drawn a great deal of attention for human health care workers over the years” (Lloyd & Campion, 2017), this excerpt does a great job of explaining how more awareness seems to be brought to this particular topic as it is physiologically affecting more and more people in this profession. One of the most emotionally draining roles taken on in the profession is the emotional stress of owners when it is time for their pet to be euthanized. This is a time of high stress for a veterinary professional mostly because the time has come for the animal when nothing further can be done to treat and rehabilitate back to health and the question of quality of life of the patient has to be considered.

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What are common symptoms or behaviors of that you can identify in the workplace?

Sometimes it can be difficult to see the signs of a person suffering from compassion fatigue because more often than not the individual will try to hide it and act like nothing is wrong. What might be noticed is a coworker's change in attitude in the work environment, becoming cynical, lacking usual quality work performance, signs of depression, and even absenteeism. It seems as though the professional can not escape the compassionate nature of their job and can not avoid being at risk of burn out or compassion fatigue, but there are a few things that can be done in order to help those who need it the most.

Treatment and prevention for compassion fatigue are important and is a topic that needs to be discussed more. Fortunately, as time goes there is now more and more awareness being raised and support being offered by employers. Creating a safe work environment is also a big component in prevention, " developing positive relationships between those who work in the veterinary practice is also vital" (Hunt, 2017). Ultimately, self care is the most important treatment *and* prevention for compassion fatigue, keeping busy or just taking personal time when not at work or after a long stressful day can help relieve some of the pressures of every day work life. Also reminding oneself to spend time and energy with loved ones who can provide great support and an open space for honesty and venting when needed.

In conclusion, we can see how the psychological affects of compassion fatigue can negatively affect many different aspects in an individuals life, work and also at home. It is something that needs to be talked about more in the workplace by speeding awareness and reassuring employees that they have a safe place and person to go to when needed. The cost of caring should never cost a person their mental, emotional, or physical well being.

## References

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