SELF COMPASSION AND MORAL INJURY

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Caring for the Human Spirit
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Contemplation is not so much concerned about the mere acquisition of knowledge, but about learning that can transform us… Bill Scheffel
Compassion and Compassion Fatigue

- Healthcare is by nature person-intensive
  - Interpersonal and human connection to those we care for
  - Inspiration: to help others

- Compassion
  - Awareness of and feeling for the pain and suffering of others
  - “Impels and empowers people to not only acknowledge, but also act”

- Compassion fatigue
  - Stress response from caring without expected rewards, results, and often closure
  - May result in diminished capacity for empathy / interpersonal engagement

Contemplative Strategies

- Range of reflective practices
  - Mindfulness meditation
  - Compassion practices
  - Somatic exercises
- Self-awareness and recognition of own limitations and suffering
- Commitment to address one’s own suffering
- Clarification of values and world view(s)
- Receptivity, compassion, and resilience

Mindfulness

- Research evidence
  - Emotional regulation and improved attention
  - Greater calm and stress reduction
  - Enhanced coping skills
- Befriend pain and/or fear
- Less emotional reactivity / more stability of mind
- Resilience and increased empathy
- Within care-giving interactions for patients, families and caregivers

Taming the Mind

Cultivating Compassion

- For self and others
- Formal and informal practices
- Awareness when struggling with feelings of inadequacy, despair, confusion (mindfulness)
- Responding with kindness and understanding (self-compassion)
- Holding difficult emotions - fear, anger, sadness, shame and self-doubt - and ourselves, in loving awareness

Germer CK and Neff KD. Self-Compassion in Clinical Practice. J Clin Psychology 69(8), 2013
Self Compassion

- Directed inwards
- Warmth and understanding when we suffer, fail or feel inadequate

- Self kindness
  - Addresses self-criticism, blaming and rumination

- Common humanity
  - We are part of greater humanity that is also suffering

- Mindfulness
  - Counters over-identification and fixation on negative thoughts

When we encounter suffering

- Factors in responding to suffering
  - Use of empathy – emotional attunement
  - Perspective taking – cognitive attunement
  - Memory – personal experience
  - Moral sensitivity – moral attunement
- Interrelated and iterative

Rushton CH, Kaszniak AW, Halifax JS, Addressing Moral Distress, J Palliative Medicine 16(9), 2013

Self Compassion and Caring for Others

- Empathy
  - Affective concern for well-being
  - Capacity to differentiate self from other
  - Ability to regulate own arousal so it becomes resilience rather than overwhelming
  - Boundaries between self and other blue
  - For caregiver, may become over-arousal and aversion
  - Fatigue and depletion

Rushton CH, Kaszniak AW, Halifax JS, Addressing Moral Distress, J Palliative Medicine 16(9), 2013
Self Compassion and Caring for Others

- **Perspective taking**
  - Ability to understand and appreciate unique vantage points of others
  - Cognitive alignment in team-based healthcare
  - Congruence in goals and values between clinicians, patient, family
  - Roles and perspectives of team members may differ
    - i.e. between nurses, surgeon, PCPs

Rushton CH, Kaszniak AW, Halifax JS, Addressing Moral Distress, J Palliative Medicine 16(9), 2013

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Self Compassion and Caring for Others

- **Moral sensitivity**
  - Institutional and normative ethics
  - Behavioral ethical guidelines
  - Recognizing conflicts and obligations to respond
  - Ability to locate and articulate source of internal discontent
  - Supports caregiver decision-making

Rushton CH, Kaszniak AW, Halifax JS, Addressing Moral Distress, J Palliative Medicine 16(9), 2013
Re-aligning Ethics and Morals

- Ethics and moral behavior
  - thought and justification of moral guidelines (normative ethics)
  - meaning in moral terms (meta-ethics)
  - specific moral guidelines (applied ethics)
  - how people actually behave (behavioral ethics)

- Life-long relationships with power and influence
- Embedded in all social relationships
- Noticing cognitive, emotional and somatic responses
Embodying and Enacting Power

Personal

Role

Status

Mindful Inquiry

- Recall a difficult dialogue
- See it in front of you
- Observe
- Invite questions for yourself / for other
- Free write
- Offer one insight / question to the circle
Closing

- Into the circle
- One sentence: An idea that excites and/or scares you
- One question for yourself or others in the room

Thank You!

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