The dragons of **stress**, **burnout** and **vicarious trauma** may be attacking...

Take Dragon Fighting Lessons

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WRHI
... or get fried.
What Makes us Vulnerable in our Work Context?

• empathy;
• personal experience;
• workload;
• age, experience & qualifications/perceptions of it;
• hearing the heart-wrenching, shocking stories;
• wanting to make a difference;
• guilt and discomfort.
Stress Management Lessons

1. Identify what you are struggling with: stress; burnout; vicarious trauma

2. Understand the impact and the environment contributing to it

3. Know your strengths, weaknesses and resources

4. Create some strategies
WHO Definition of Health (1946)

"a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

Mental ill-health is associated with physical ill-health and vice versa…
Stress

• appears when the demands are greater than our resources
### Stress Warning Signs and Symptoms

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<td>- Memory problems</td>
<td>- Moodiness</td>
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<td>- Inability to concentrate</td>
<td>- Irritability or short temper</td>
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<td>- Poor judgment</td>
<td>- Agitation, inability to relax</td>
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<td>- Seeing only the negative</td>
<td>- Feeling overwhelmed</td>
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<td>- Anxious or racing thoughts</td>
<td>- Sense of loneliness and isolation</td>
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<td>- Constant worrying</td>
<td>- Depression or general unhappiness</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Aches and pains</td>
<td>- Eating more or less</td>
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<td>- Diarrhoea or constipation</td>
<td>- Sleeping too much or too little</td>
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<td>- Nausea, dizziness</td>
<td>- Isolating yourself from others</td>
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<td>- Chest pain, rapid heartbeat</td>
<td>- Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities</td>
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<td>- Loss of sex drive</td>
<td>- Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax</td>
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<td>- Frequent colds</td>
<td>- Nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing)</td>
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Burnout

- state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion caused by long term involvement in emotionally demanding situation

- “the total psychic energy of a person is consumed in trying to maintain the fires of existence” – energy crisis

- Tiredness, emotional depletion, too much caring and too little self caring

- Burnout has 3 dimensions:
  - Emotional exhaustion
  - Depersonalization (negative attitude towards patients)
  - Reduced personal accomplishment and commitment
The environment: Burnout

- Workload
- Control issues
- Lack of reward
- Absence of support or community
- Lack of fairness
- Discordant values
- The stories

James2008
Potential Impact of Stress and Burnout

**Service provider**

- Fatigue and inattention: increased errors in judgment, increased workplace injuries
- Behavioral changes: irritability, somatic complaints, substance abuse; distancing from family and friends
- Anger, fear, guilt
- Depression: inability to cope
- Fear of stigma/violence: increased focus on self and insensitive to patients
- Absenteeism, tardiness, poor job performance; colleague/interpersonal conflict

**Patient**

- Decreased quality of care
- Physical or verbal abuse towards patients
- Insensitivity to the needs of patients
Vicarious Trauma

In SA, trauma experiences can be part of the life stories we hear. When these become overwhelming - the impact of vicarious trauma can be felt…
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) DSM-IV

- Experienced an event in which the life or physical safety of oneself or other was threatened or damaged.
- The individual experienced intense fear, helplessness, or horror in response.
- The individual continues to re-experience the event after it is over.
- The individual seeks to avoid reminders of the event.
- The individual exhibits signs of persistent arousal.
- Flight – fight – freeze response of autonomic nervous system ‘gets stuck’
PTS vs CTS

PTS
- Single or multiple
- Past
- Past threat
- Safety can be re-established
- Co-morbidity can be treated
- Substance abuse can be treated
- Trust in state systems of protection eg police
- Often no threat to family or community networks and systems

CTS
- Multiple and ongoing
- Present
- Threat is current and real
- Safety difficult to establish
- Co-morbidity difficult to treat
- Maladaptive coping means survival
- Lack of trust in state systems of protection and help
- Threat to family and community networks and systems
- High frequency events/dose response
- Helplessness
Proximity of Trauma

- Simple view: closer to the event, fewer people are effected but the effect is more intense (a spatial view)
- Greater the proximity, larger the impact will be
- However, proximity not just spatial
  - Spatial; Relational; Temporal
- Relational proximity increases, impact dramatically increases
- Meaning impacted in relation to other events and characteristics of events
- Recognise event in broader context
Vicarious Trauma

• Ongoing traumatic exposure as a result of regular exposure to traumatized persons

• Become traumatised by clients’ stories

• You feel changed, world view challenged, intrusive imagery, avoidance, hyperarousal

• Confusion, tearfulness, isolation, anger, irritability, sense of powerlessness, hopelessness, intellectualise, resistance to change, burdened, rigidity, believe client’s problem are insurmountable or insignificant

• Psychosomatic symptoms, personal vulnerability and survivor guilt
Impact of Vicarious Trauma on researchers; service providers

- Anger at other Service Providers
- Powerless and guilt
- Gender
- Generalisations
- Personal safety
- Fear and forboding
- Distancing from friends and family
- Effects of researching your own community
- Alcohol
Self Care: Definition

Looking after yourself:
- Within your work context
- Within your personal context
Why is it important to take care of ourselves?

To be holistically healthy individuals, in our professional and personal lives.

• Creates positivity and confidence
• More able to manage the roles we have
• To feel more supported and less isolated
• To give higher quality of care and service
• To feel more confident in talking to other professionals about experiences and needs
• To be self aware and understand the motivation and the reason we do the job that we are doing at this point – to reconnect to the meaning of our work for ourselves.
• To be able to function to our best ability at home
What have you put in place for you?
HOW OTHERS SEE YOU IS NOT IMPORTANT, HOW YOU SEE YOURSELF MEANS EVERYTHING
Self Care Tips in the Work Place

• Sharing with colleagues / talking it through at work
• Regular Breaks
• Openness about difficulties experienced at work
• Time-Management and shift management
• Time-Out (including occasional half days)
• Unwinding outside work with colleagues
• Formal talk therapy and counselling outside of work
• Debriefing
• Support from managers; work-load management; clear reporting strategies; fairness at work
Build your support structures

• Remember your family and your support system – draw on your friends and family
• Speak with your manager when something is not working out
• If for several days you are feeling exhausted, detached (not yourself), feeling low; not recognising your work achievements; and find that you are not working effectively, you may need a break – take it.
Hard to “see” both images

• We are largely programmed to “see” only one focal point…we are good investigators of that one focus.
• It is difficult to ‘let go’ of what we see and challenge ourselves and “see” the other focal point.
• We get so used to looking at something right in front of us that we stop “seeing” it and resultantly, don’t address it.
• Positive images are ALWAYS supported by negative space that is crucial for their existence.
Balance the wheels of life

1. Take an A4 piece paper
2. Draw a dot in the centre, representing you
3. Now think of the key things that you invest energy in...your significant relationship, work, children, studies, faith, friends, hobby, sport...etc
4. Draw a line from the dot with the length of the line representing the energy that you invest in each of these areas
5. Connect the ends of the line – does your wheel roll?
Your strategies for the next month?

• For support
• For managing work load
• For self awareness
• For unwinding
• For relaxation
• For growth
• For self-care
Acknowledgments…

- Kirsten Thomson
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