



Understanding **compassion fatigue**

University 
Medical Center
New Orleans
LCMC Health

Working in a hospital requires a deep commitment to helping others when they need it most. It's likely you were drawn to this field because of your empathy — you might naturally feel for other people's pain and struggles.

However, this can be a demanding and emotionally-taxing job. Over time, the stress of working in a high-pressure environment can lead to a condition known as compassion fatigue. If left unchecked, compassion fatigue can hurt your capabilities to help other people as well as yourself.



What is compassion fatigue?

Compassion fatigue refers to the emotional exhaustion that can result from caring for others. Coming into close daily contact with people dealing with serious health conditions and life situations can be overwhelming. While some degree of stress can be expected from working in a hospital, compassion fatigue occurs when you give so much of your time, energy, and empathy that you lack the capacity to attend to your own needs.



Symptoms of compassion fatigue

The symptoms of compassion fatigue can vary from person to person, but some common signs include:

- Feelings of emotional exhaustion, such as fatigue, lack of energy, and a sense of being drained
- Decreased empathy and compassion towards patients, colleagues, and loved ones
- Difficulty sleeping
- Increased irritability, mood swings, or anger
- Feeling detached from work or personal relationships
- Physical symptoms, such as headaches, stomach aches, and muscle tension.

Causes of compassion fatigue

Providing care to those who are suffering requires us to draw upon our empathy. Yet, empathy is a resource that can temporarily run out. It needs time to recharge. Being exposed to other people's physical and emotional trauma can put a strain on your capacity for empathy, especially if you are working long hours, not feeling supported in your professional or personal life, or not taking care of your own physical or mental health.



Ways to avoid and recover from compassion fatigue

- **Reflect on your feelings** – If you're feeling overwhelmed, take time to process your feelings about work, and be honest about your limitations. It's okay to ask for help when you need it. Journaling can be a great first step, but seeing a therapist can often be the best way to work through difficult emotions and get back to your healthy self.
- **Sleep enough** – Getting enough sleep is crucial to maintaining your physical and emotional well-being. Everyone has different sleep needs, but you should be mindful that you are actually getting enough. Generally, you should aim for at least eight hours.
- **Eat well** – Eating a balanced and nutritious diet can help you feel better physically and emotionally. Try to avoid consuming too much caffeine, sugar, and alcohol, as these can exacerbate feelings of stress and anxiety.
- **Get exercise** – Exercise is an excellent way to reduce stress and boost your mood. Aim to get at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day, whether it's a walk outside or a yoga class.
- **Relax** – When you're not working, take time to relax and do things that you enjoy, such as reading, listening to music, or taking a bath. This can help you recharge and feel refreshed.
- **Find support** – It's important to have a support system of friends, family, and colleagues who understand the demands of your job. If you're struggling or dreading work that you once enjoyed, don't be afraid to reach out for help when you need it.

Where to find support at University Medical Center New Orleans

- Remember it is okay to talk to our support system: friends, family, and colleagues
- Sometimes we all need extra support, and that's okay too, below is a list of more resources

For group settings, attend UMCNO Schwartz Rounds

What are Schwartz Rounds? Schwartz Rounds are grand rounds style events that focus on a case, or a theme related to the emotional impact of patient care that care team members experience. A multidisciplinary panel is facilitated to share their experiences, and then the discussion opens to comments from audience participants. It is a great way to reflect on subjects that may not be typically discussed in a group forum.



If you need to talk to someone



UMCNO Spiritual Care

Office open Monday-Friday
8:30am-4:30pm
504.702.3064

Please leave a message and call-back number anytime. A member of our Spiritual Care team will get back to you as soon as possible.

LCMC Health EAP

Vital Worklife: 800.383.1908
VITALWorkLife.com
Click "Member Login"
Username: lcmc
Password: lcmc
or Download VITALWorkLife App
Username: lcmc
Create personalized login

LCMC Health Be Well Center

LCMChhealth.sharepoint.com/
Be-Well/SitePages/Home.aspx

Faculty, Clinicians, Residents and Fellows

Tulane

New Directions EAP

800.624.5544
ndbh.com/
Company code: Tulane

LSU

Campus Assistance Program

504.568.8888
225.578.8200

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

lsu.edu/hrm/employees/
employee_resources/
employee_assistance_
program.php



This resource has been provided by:

Taylor Parks, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Psychiatry
Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences
Tulane University School of Medicine

Amanda Gallagher, PhD

Clinical Psychologist
Assistant Professor
Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences
Tulane University School of Medicine

University Medical Center New Orleans

Mental and Behavioral Health