



Compassion Practice: Preventing Burnout

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As pediatric anesthesiologists, our capacity to engage patients' suffering is foundational to professionalism and the care we provide. Furthermore, our social contract obligates us to relieve our patients' suffering with acts of compassion. Compassion requires that we experience empathy, yet it also requires us to embody a motivational wish to ease our patients' suffering. When we feel empathy without compassion, we risk experiencing empathic distress, leading to distancing from our patients and contributing to moral distress and burnout.

Empathy

- Empathy requires perspective-taking and a felt experience of another being's emotional state.
- Empathy allows us to resonate with another person's emotional state, both positive and negative.

VS

Compassion

- Compassion is a positive affective experience whereby one attunes to another's suffering with a motivating wish to ease that suffering.
- It is kindled by warm-heartedness, kindness, and feelings of connection.

Requirements for Compassionate Care

- Cognitive: Awareness of suffering
- Affective: Caring and attuned concern
- Intentional: Wish to relieve or ease suffering
- Behavioral: Readiness to take action

Compassion Benefits

Parasympathetic nervous system activation
 ↑Happiness
 ↑Endorphins
 ↑Oxytocin
 ↓Stress response & ↓Inflammation

Key Compassion Concepts

- Compassion does not mean that we must share in the suffering of others. Instead, it is characterized by feelings of warmth, concern, and care for the other.
- Compassion meets suffering with action.
- Compassion fatigue is a misnomer - Compassion doesn't fatigue; empathy does!
- Compassion is associated with neural networks of affiliation, love, and reward (orbitofrontal cortex, ventral striatum, and pregenual anterior cortex).
- Compassion practices have been demonstrated to be beneficial both for the receiver and giver of compassion and are skills that can be cultivated.

Compassion, love, and pleasure signal together!

Resources

1. Singer T, Klimecki. Empathy and compassion. *Current Biology*. 2014. 24(18): R875-8.
2. Klimecki OM, Leiberg S, Ricard M, Singer T. Differential pattern of functional brain plasticity after compassion and empathy training. *Social cognitive and affective neuroscience*. 2014;9(6): 873-9.
3. Mascaro JS, Rilling JK, Tenzin Negi L, Raison CL. Compassion meditation enhances empathic accuracy and related neural activity. *Social cognitive and affective neuroscience*. 2013;8(1):48-55.