

# Transcending Burnout: Strategies for avoiding Severe Role Stress in AOD Nurses.



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# Presenter Background

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- Mental health Nurse: 25 years.
- Community Mental Health Nurse (CAT / ECAT Team) for 14 years.
- Masters in Burnout in Community Mental Health Nurses.
- PhD in Transcending (overcoming) Burnout in Community Mental Health Nurses.

# Burnout and AOD Nurses?

- Nursing staff working in AOD are faced with a difficult set of factors that make for an increasingly challenging working environment:
  - Increasingly challenging / high acuity / complex clients.
  - Client reluctance / ambivalence about engaging in treatment.
  - High levels of client relapse / ‘revolving door’ syndrome.
  - Increasing workload (both in terms of volume and complexity).
  - Limited resources / increasing demands.
  - Healthcare politics.
  - Tedious and time consuming documentation / paper work.
  - Professional Stigma / low Prestige.
  - Negative community attitudes towards drug users (and the people who work with them)

# Burnout and AOD Nurses?

- Stress and Burnout in AOD nurses can manifest in a wide variety of ways including:

<b>Work performance</b> Declining / inconsistent performance Loss of enthusiasm Accidents / uncharacteristic mistakes Increased time at work Lack of holiday planning / leave requests Indecision Memory lapses Criticism of others Lack of cooperation with others	<b>Physical symptoms</b> Nervous stumbling speech Sweating Tiredness / lethargy Frequent headaches Hand tremor Rapid weight loss or gain Upset stomach Lack of interest in appearance / hygiene Increased alcohol consumption / smoking Out of character behaviours
<b>Withdrawal behaviours</b> Reluctance to give support to coworkers Arriving late and / or leaving early Extended lunch breaks Increased absenteeism Reduced social interaction	<b>Emotional reactions</b> Crying Irritability / moodiness Over reactions to problems Temper outbursts Aggressive behaviour Sudden mood swings

# Burnout and AOD Nurses?

- A checklist of early warning signs of increased risk of chronic Stress and Burnout includes experience the following signs and symptoms of stress / burnout on a regular basis:
  1. Exhausted, tired and physically run down.
  2. Feel annoyed or irritated towards co-workers.
  3. Cynical and negative towards work.
  4. Care less about doing a “good job”.
  5. A sense of being besieged.
  6. Losing your temper.
  7. Frequent headaches and / or gastrointestinal disturbances.
  8. Weight loss or gain.
  9. Difficulty sleeping.
  10. Difficulty thinking logically and making decisions.
  11. Unable to relax and concentrate (at home and / or work).
  12. Feeling weepy or tearful.

If you recognise 2 or 3 (or more) of these symptoms, then you (or your colleague) may be at risk of chronic stress, and potentially burnout. (NCETA, 2005)

# Why does this Matter to You?

- Because all of this means you at significant risk of Burnout:
  - It is a very real problem.
  - It is subtle, insidious and devastating.
  - It can happen to all of us; no one is immune (seriously; no one!).
  - It's most commonly noticed only in hindsight.
  - Easily to see in others; much more difficult to see in ones self.
  - Most nurses who suffer with burnout describe being blindsided by the experience.

# Why does this Matter to You?

- Did I mention that:
  - It can happen to any one of us...
  - No one is immune...
  - Most nurses who suffer with burnout do not see it coming...

# Why does this Matter to You?

- All of which reminds me of the following concept central to our understanding of work with trauma:
- There are three common areas evident in most traumatic experiences:
  1. The individual did not expect or anticipate the event.
  2. The individual was not properly prepared.
  3. The individual was not able to doing anything to prevent the event from occurring.

# What Exactly do we Mean by Burnout?

- Before we do a quick run through the theory around the concept of burnout it is probably useful to start with a quick (honest) reflection on your own personal construct of the phenomena of **'burnout'**:
  - *What does the term 'burnout' mean to you?*
  - *When you hear the word what (or who) comes to mind.*
  - *What do you think causes burnout?*
  - *Have you ever worked with a colleague who is burnout?*
  - *Do you currently work with a colleague who is burnout?*
  - *Have you ever been burnt out?*
  - *What is the culture surrounding burnout like where you work?*
  - *What is the source of all these ideas? (and how much rationality / irrationality underpins this?).*

# What Exactly do we Mean by Burnout?

- Burnout is a psychological phenomenon that can happen to anyone.
- It occurs as a consequence of working with people which requires that we utilise a great deal of our 'self' in the caring process.
- Professional burnout is generally described as prolonged stress that impairs one's ability to perform his or her job in demanding situations.
- Risk factors for nursing burnout include:
  - Practice environment [workload / acuity].
  - Compassion fatigue.
  - [Im]balance between family and career.
  - Sickness / absence.
  - Loss of confidence.
  - A sense of disconnection.

# What Exactly do we Mean by Burnout?

- The Maslach Burnout Inventory (1978) is the most widely respected / utilised scale for measuring Burnout in healthcare professionals. It measures burnout in terms of:
  - Emotional Exhaustion: measures feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work
  - Depersonalization: measures an unfeeling and impersonal response toward recipients of one's service, care treatment, or instruction.
  - Reduced Personal Accomplishment: measures feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work

# What exactly do we mean by Burnout?

- Emotional Exhaustion: measures feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work:
- It is characterised by:
  - Emotion fatigue.
  - Physical fatigue.
  - Feeling psychologically and emotionally drained.
  - Nothing left to give.
  - Inadequate personal resources to deal with work.

# What exactly do we mean by Burnout?

- Depersonalization: measures an unfeeling and impersonal response toward recipients of one's service, care treatment, or instruction.
- It is characterised by:
  - A tendency to dehumanise patients.
  - Referring to patients by their diagnosis / location.
  - Seeing all patients as the same.
  - Generalising / basing decisions on assumptions rather than specifics.
  - Seeing the illness rather than the person.

# What exactly do we mean by Burnout?

- Reduced Personal Accomplishment: measures feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work:
- It is characterised by:
  - Lost sense of value in ones work.
  - Feeling overwhelmed by ‘the system’.
  - Feeling like what you do makes no difference [disempowerment].
  - Feelings of despair / hopelessness / helplessness toward the issues in the ‘system’.

# What exactly do we mean by Burnout?

- It is worth noting that whilst the core features of Burnout remain fairly consistent, the expression and manifestation of Burnout as well as the local culture around this phenomenon varies significantly from clinical location to location.
- This is one of the things that has made the development of a meaningful and consistent widespread strategy to prevent / combat burnout so difficult to achieve.

# How does Burnout Occur?

- Burnout refers to a process in which the a nurse's attitudes and behaviour may change in negative ways in response to job stress.
- Burnout is a stress induced problem commonly found amongst human service professionals, which is characterized by emotional exhaustion, a reduced sense of personal accomplishment, and depersonalisation (Pines and Maslach, 1978).
- Burnout occurs when support staff feel that their work has no meaning and stress continually outweighs the support and rewards that they receive in return.
- Workplace Stress does not always lead to burnout and many stressed nurses never develop burnout.

# Stress or Burnout?

Stress vs. Burnout	
Stress	Burnout
Characterized by over-engagement	Characterized by disengagement
Emotions are overreactive	Emotions are blunted
Produces urgency and hyperactivity	Produces helplessness and hopelessness
Loss of energy	Loss of motivation, ideals, and hope
Leads to anxiety disorders	Leads to detachment and depression
Primary damage is physical	Primary damage is emotional
May kill you prematurely	May make life seem not worth living

Source: <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/preventing-burnout.htm>

# The Notion of Transcending.

- Derived from the Latin *transcendere*, the word transcend is defined as to; ‘be beyond the range of or domain or grasp of (human experience, reason, belief, etc.); excel, surpass’  
—(Australian Macquarie Dictionary 5<sup>th</sup> Ed (2009) p.667).
- It reflected the qualities of the human experience being described in that it encompassed the idea of surpassing (the domain or grasp) of the human experience (of burnout).
- A phenomenon that enables a person to extend person boundaries, and in doing so enhances one’s feeling of self worth.

# The Notion of Transcending.

- The qualities of transcending are best captured by Kvigne & Kirkevold (2002) who stated;
  - Transcendence captures the idea that people are directed beyond themselves towards something else, something more, by their intentional consciousness.
  - They have an urge to go beyond what is given, i.e. the circumstances that they find themselves in.
  - Transcendence finds expression in actions and projects with a clear content and target.
  - Transcendence is not the same as developmental changes related to growth. It requires **conscious and purposeful action** performed by a **conscious, creative human subject** (Kvigne & Kirkevold, 2002, p.81).

# The Notion of Transcending.

- So therefore, to Transcend adversity (burnout) involves the individual;
  - Engaging in an active (rather than passive) process.
  - Making considered and deliberate decisions to move towards something more beyond the current state. It is more than just survival or innate resilience; it is considered personal choice and action leading to change.
  - Possessing a commitment toward /a belief in there being a better situation than the one in which they find themselves even when this is not evident or visible.
  - Trusting in their own ability to engage with the situation and themselves to create motion towards a better circumstance.
  - Engaging in clear and deliberate actions / behaviours / strategies designed to accomplish clearly defined goals.

# Transcending Burnout Applied.

- 1. Transcending Burnout through Personal Strength: Grim Determination, Pragmatism and Optimism involves:
  - being able to know and tap into your own strengths and capacity to endure.
  - allowing yourself to be guided by your own pragmatic needs or values.
  - drawing heavily upon your inherent intrapersonal qualities.

# Transcending Burnout Applied.

- 2. Transcending Burnout through Reaching for Support involves:
  - being able to interact and converse with others about how you are feeling [primarily colleagues].
  - being able to feel both safe and able to reveal your feelings of uncertainty, vulnerability and your loss of confidence.
  - reaching for support from colleagues within your team, through supervision or informally through your collegial networks of MH nurses.
  - Developing / maintaining the sense of being understood and of not being alone as the essential element.

# Transcending Burnout Applied.

- 3. Transcending Burnout through Weathering the Storm involves:
  - persisting and pushing on through difficulty and adversity and moving forward.
  - accepting this as being an integral element in transcending burnout.
  - constructing and maintaining a hypothetical escape hatch providing a feeling of choice.
  - remaining and persisting because you want to, not because you have to.
  - understanding your experience of moving past and beyond would ebb and flow.

# Transcending Burnout Applied.

- 4. Transcending Burnout through Making Sense of the Personal Non-Sense and Re-Finding Clinical Meaning involves.
  - developing an increasing intrapersonal understanding of the situation.
  - making sense of your abilities and limitations as nurses having experienced burnout.
  - reflecting upon your practice and ‘reconstructing’ this again understand your experiences.
  - being able to reconnect with your sense of clinical meaning and the value of your clinical practice.

# Transcending Burnout Applied.

- 5. Transcending Burnout through Regaining Balance and Lost Control involves:
  - being able to recognise and understand your loss of control and balance.
  - being able to rationalise your surroundings to allow you to make decisions about the scope and limitations of your practice.
  - And subsequently being able to reassume control in practical behaviours that will have the resultant effect of returning your life to a more balanced state.

# Transcending Burnout Applied.

6. Transcending Burnout through connection with the World Outside involves:

- being able to reconnect with your life outside of work as a counter-weight to burnout.
- spending time with close friends and family for simple enjoyment and to unload negative emotions.
- engaging with the world outside as offering opportunities for simple distraction and the chance to think about something else.
- engaging in self-caring and self-soothing activities.

# Transcending Burnout Applied.

- 7. Transcending Burnout through Rebuilding the Boundaries / Setting and Affirming Realistic Expectations involves:
  - repairing and rebuilding your boundaries based upon realistic self-expectation.
  - accepting the limits of your own practice, separating the ideal from the actual and accepting limitations.
  - setting limits on yourself, and being willing to disseminate the responsibility for patient care.
  - ensuring the personal boundary between work life and home / personal life was kept in good repair.

# Transcending Burnout Applied.

- 8. Transcending Burnout as the Road Goes Ever On involves:
  - Acknowledging the idea that whilst you have transcended your recent experience of burnout there may be further episodes emerge for you in the future.
  - calmly accepting the possibility of future episodes of burnout.
  - describing a clear sense of growth and broader understanding of themselves and your feelings related to transcending (burnout).
  - re-finding aspects of yourself that you previous thought lost as well.
  - developing new strengths and resources that you are able to identify as being important in your working life moving into the future; this is the rainbow at the end of the storm.

# Practical Stuff: what can the Team Do?

- A Team-wide approach to addressing the risk of Burnout is going to go a long way towards promoting collegiality and increasing a sense of support [1]:
  - Identify and name the biggest issues facing you all as a team (this draws on collective experience and promotes ownership).
  - Identify things that do work and don't work (and why) in terms of team practice.
  - Name and shame clearly 'silly' things in team culture / practice.
  - Clarify essential workload verses desirable workload.

# Practical Stuff: what can the Team Do?

- A Team-wide approach to addressing the risk of Burnout is going to go a long way towards promoting collegiality and increasing a sense of support [2]:
  - Acknowledge this issue and risk that faces all of you; de-stigmatise burnout in your team.
  - Make time to check in on each other and see how you're doing.
  - Be willing to undertake 'courageous' conversations.

# Practical Stuff: what can You Do?

- Seek **Support** to manage the Stress.
  - Seeking informal support is often the first step though think about how to frame this conversation:
    - This place is so terrible that I'm completely stressed out (less helpful).
    - I'm finding things really stressful and I'm not sure how to cope (more helpful).
  - The person you talk to doesn't have to be able to “fix” your stressors; they just have to be a good listener, someone who'll listen attentively without being distracted or judging you [this goes both ways].
  - Opening up is often anxiety provoking however most colleagues / friends / family will be flattered that you trust them enough to confide in them, and it will only strengthen your friendship.
  - If this isn't enough then you need to speak to your manager; they can't support you if they don't know how you're feeling.

# Practical Stuff: what can You Do?

- Revisit and re-evaluate **Boundaries** [personal and professional].
  - Set boundaries both at work and relating to work / home life.
    - Works stays at work / home stays at home.
    - ensure that you shake off your work place stress before you get home.
  - Set boundaries on electronic communication (i.e. no work email attached to your personal computer / phone).
  - Don't give up valued home life activities because you need to 'work'.
  - Don't bring work home with you to do.

# Practical Stuff: what can You Do?

- Actively engage in **Activities** that promote relaxation and reduce stress:
- Take a daily break from technology. Set a time each day when you completely disconnect. Put away your laptop, turn off your phone, and stop checking email.
- Nourish your creative side. Creativity is a powerful antidote to burnout. Try something new, start a fun project, or resume a favourite hobby. Choose activities that have nothing to do with work.
- Set aside relaxation time. Relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, and deep breathing activate the body's relaxation response, a state of restfulness that is the opposite of the stress response.
- Get plenty of sleep. Feeling tired can exacerbate burnout by causing you to think irrationally. Keep your cool in stressful situations by getting a good night's sleep.

# Practical Stuff: what can You Do?

- **Re-Frame** how you look at Work:
- Try to find some value in what you do. Even in some mundane jobs, you can often focus on how what you do helps others, for example, or provides a much needed product or service.
- Look for opportunities to focus on different aspects of your work; find a new portfolio or role within the team that can challenge and invigorate you.
- Focus on aspects of the job that you do enjoy—even if it's just chatting with your co-workers at lunch. Changing your attitude towards your job can help you regain a sense of purpose and control.
- Invest in the relationships at work. Having positive relationships with colleagues to chat and joke with during the day can help relieve stress from an unfulfilling or demanding job, improve your job performance, or simply get you through a rough day.

# Practical Stuff: what can You Do?

- Develop a **Realistic Understanding** of the reality of wrking environment along with an acceptance of what you can and con't change:
- Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems. You can't change the fact that highly stressful events happen, but you can change how you interpret and respond to these events.
- Accept that adversity and change are an integral part of living. Certain goals may no longer be attainable as a result of adverse situations.
- Accepting circumstances that cannot be changed can help you focus on circumstances that you can alter.

# Practical Stuff: what can You Do?

- Set, work and achieve **Personal Goals** to change the things you can:
- Move toward your goals. Develop some realistic goals. Do something regularly — even if it seems like a small accomplishment — that enables you to move toward your goals.
- Instead of focusing on tasks that seem unachievable, ask yourself, "What's one thing I know I can accomplish today that helps me move in the direction I want to go?"
- Take decisive actions. Act on adverse situations as much as you can. Take decisive actions, rather than detaching completely from problems and stresses and wishing they would just go away.
- Look for opportunities for self-discovery. People often learn something about themselves and may find that they have grown in some respect as a result of their struggle with loss.

# Practical Stuff: what can You Do?

- Maintain a **Positive View** of yourself at Work:
- Nurture a positive view of yourself. Developing confidence in your ability to solve problems and trusting your instincts helps build resilience.
- Keep things in perspective. Even when facing very painful events, try to consider the stressful situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. Avoid blowing the event out of proportion.
- Maintain a hopeful outlook. An optimistic outlook enables you to expect that good things will happen in your life. Try visualizing what you want, rather than worrying about what you fear.
- Take care of yourself. Pay attention to and be Mindful of your own needs and feelings.

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• QUESTIONS?

