Session E: Psychologist Well-Being and Competent Practice

Presented by the WVPA Colleague Assistance Committee
Disclaimers

- The presenters have no financial or personal conflicts of interest re: this symposium.

- The information in this symposium is derived from:
  - Empirical literature available through peer reviewed journals
  - Primary source data from survey of WV psychologists and psychologists-in-training
  - Best practices and professional standards
Symposium Agenda

- Part 1: Self-Care as a Foundation for Ethical Practice (1:00-2:30)
- Refreshment Break (2:30-3:00)
- Part 2: Exploring the Benefits of and Need for Colleague Assistance (3:00-4:30)
Self-Care as a Foundation for Ethical Practice

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Self-Assessment

- Professional Quality of Life Questionnaire
- Self-Care Assessment

Please take a moment to complete each measure and score your responses.
(This is for your own information and confidential)
Psychologists are Vulnerable to Distress, Burn-Out, and Compassion Fatigue 1,2

- **Distress**
  - Emotional response a person has in response to challenges, demands, and stresses in their life 1
  - Is a normal part of life, but can lead to burnout over time

- **Burn-Out**
  - Overwhelming Exhaustion
  - Cynicism and Detachment
  - Lack of Accomplishment

- **Compassion Fatigue**
  - Reduced capacity for empathy
• Everyone may experience distress at some point.

• Distress, burn-out, compassion fatigue, and problems with professional competence fall along a continuum.

• Burn-out and difficulty coping can develop slowly and gradually.

• Active self-assessment and self-care can help us recognize and address distress as it is happening, rather than becoming aware in hind-sight.
Mental Health Impacts for Psychologists

• Depression
  • The most commonly cited concern, with endorsement rates in surveys ~ 50% to 60%.  
  • Psychologists also endorse high rates of anxiety (~40%) and emotional exhaustion.  

• Personal Crisis
  • 29% of surveyed psychologists reported having felt suicidal in the past.  
  • 2% to 4% of psychologists reported having attempted suicide when distressed.  
  • Compared to other occupations (controlling for age/gender/race), psychologists have higher rates of suicide.  
Risks for Distressed Practitioners

- Failing to Meet Standards of Care
- Practicing While Impaired
  - In one survey, 6% of psychologists reported providing therapy while intoxicated by alcohol.\(^7\)
- Reduced Quality of Care
  - 36.7% of psychologists reported providing reduced quality of care when distressed \(^4\)
- Ineffective/Inadequate Care
  - 4.6% of psychologists acknowledged providing care that was inadequate due to personal distress \(^4\)
  - 59.6% of clinicians acknowledged working when too distressed to be effective. \(^7\)
Principle A: Beneficence and Nonmaleficence - Psychologists are aware of the possible effects of our own physical and mental health on our ability to help those with whom we work.

Ethical Standard 2.03 – Psychologists make ongoing efforts to develop and maintain our competence.

Ethical Standard 2.06 - Psychologists monitor and assess our ability to practice competently and take steps, seek treatment, or even stop practicing for a time if personal problems, distress, or illness interfere with the ability to practice.
Self-Care Supports Quality of Life and Competent Practice\(^1,2\)

- Can relieve stress and prevent progression to burn-out
- Can foster experience of positive emotions and improve resilience
- Can role-model positive self-care for colleagues and learners
- Can help us slow down and evaluate need for additional supports or intervention

- Self-care is most effective if we schedule small self-care breaks regularly throughout our days.
What self-care strategies do you currently use?
Based on your self-care assessment, are there any self-care strategies you would like to add?
What barriers do you experience in your self-care practice?

Develop your own cope-ahead plan on the worksheet provided – ask your group for help!
Large Group Discussion

- What barriers to self-care did we identify in our groups?
- What were some of the strategies for overcoming barriers?
- For the self-care skills we already use, what helps us to be successful?
- How can we support/affirm our colleagues in their self-care?
- In our professional roles, how might we bring self-care into our workplace?
- What other topics arose in small group discussion?
References

8. Smith et al. (2009). Psychologist impairment: What is it, how can it be prevented, and what can be done to address it? Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice, 16, 1-16