

Self-Care

KEY POINTS

- ➔ Caring for someone at the end of life can be a tremendous challenge for healthcare providers and family members, which can lead to burnout, compassion fatigue, and trauma
 - ⌚ In many settings, family members often have a primary caregiving role and may need self-care support from the healthcare providers
- ➔ People may experience a range of physical, emotional, social, and spiritual experiences from stress and burnout
- ➔ Self-care involves paying attention to how we are impacted by providing care, developing strategies to manage stress and prevent burnout, and accessing additional supports as needed
- ➔ There are a wide range of physical, emotional, social, and spiritual strategies which can support self-care

FACTORS WHICH CAN AFFECT RESILIENCE

A variety of factors may impact a person's capacity to provide care, including:

- ➔ Coping mechanisms and previous traumatic experiences
- ➔ Type of disease and other characteristics of the ill individual
- ➔ Previous experiences, comfort, and skill in providing care to a sick person
 - ⌚ Access to skilled healthcare providers who can provide support and advice
- ➔ Personal medical conditions, particularly mental health conditions
- ➔ Isolation from usual self-care supports – home, community, and spiritual/religious
- ➔ Access to psychological and spiritual supports – from professionals and/or informal supports

Additional Factors for Healthcare Providers

- ➔ Work environment – supportive environment, access to debriefing support
- ➔ Adequate training to effectively provide palliative care and relieve suffering

Additional Factors for Family Caregivers

- ➔ Presence of family conflict
- ➔ Cultural and social expectations of caregiving
- ➔ Staying in a health facility far from the home community
- ➔ Financial needs – availability and cost of medications and supplies

SIGNS OF STRESS AND BURNOUT

These reactions may occur in both family caregivers and healthcare providers

Physical:

- ➔ Fatigue
- ➔ Headaches, muscle aches, and generalized or localized body pains
- ➔ Changes in sleep
- ➔ Numbness
- ➔ Poor concentration
- ➔ GI symptoms – changes in appetite, nausea
- ➔ Difficulty breathing
- ➔ Palpitations

Emotional, Social, and Spiritual:

- ➔ Feelings of powerlessness or helplessness
- ➔ Loss of hope
- ➔ Withdrawal from family and social support system
- ➔ Survivor guilt

- ➔ Fears about the future
- ➔ Resentment for the demands and responsibilities of caregiving
- ➔ Guilt around care provided
- ➔ Unresolved or complicated grief
- ➔ Spiritual or religious or existential concerns
- ➔ Distress, depression, and anxiety
- ➔ Harmful illicit drug and alcohol use

SELF-CARE STRATEGIES

Assessment

The following questions may be helpful in assessing the experiences of others and ourselves:

- ➔ How are you doing with providing care for?
 - ➔ What do you feel you are doing well, what is challenging?
- ➔ How do you feel physically?
 - ➔ Have you been experiencing any problems with sleep, pain, poor concentration, etc.?
- ➔ How are you feeling emotionally?
 - ➔ How have you been coping with the range of feelings and emotions?
- ➔ How are you caring for yourself?
 - ➔ What is giving you strength at this difficult time?
- ➔ What does your personal support system look like?
 - ➔ What supports do you find most helpful?

Management

Different people will find different strategies more effective for them personally. The following list includes some common strategies which many people find helpful:

- ➔ Basic needs – nutritious food, exercise, adequate sleep
 - ➔ Attend to your own health needs

- ➔ Balance – between personal life and work life
 - ➔ Set aside regular times to do things you enjoy
- ➔ Relaxation and self-reflection – taking time to assess your personal feelings, through meditation, prayer, or journaling
 - ➔ Acknowledge what you are doing well in your care-giving
- ➔ Informal support – connect with family and friends
- ➔ Formal support – peers, supervisor, debriefing, might include access to counselling and support groups
- ➔ Ritual – memorial services or other forms of remembering and providing closure
- ➔ Education and training – aimed at understanding issues regarding dying and grief, effects of providing care, communication techniques

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