

## Mental Health training / compassion fatigue a growing issue

To say these are unprecedented times, more unique times, or very trying times, is I think we all agree understatement! As we move forward the key question is how will organisations help support staff not just in this crisis but more importantly afterwards particularly with regards to mental health and well being.

There has been a huge increase in interest and delivery of mental health training, stress management and resilience training over the past few years. In the health and social care sector another important training programme has also come to the fore in compassion fatigue, often described as the cost of caring.

A great quote I often use in my compassion fatigue programme states “The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet” (Remen, 1996)



In the coming year I firmly believe that training and support for staff around compassion fatigue will no longer apply just to one sector but will encompass all sectors and all levels. Training staff and managers in the core fundamentals around compassion fatigue will take us beyond the stress management or resilience training and into a vitally important area which we will all need.

**So what is compassion fatigue?** It can be best described as a state of tension and preoccupation with individual or cumulative trauma of clients as manifested in one or more ways, including re-experiencing of traumatic events, avoidance/numbing and persistent arousal. In core terms it is often the natural consequential stress resulting from caring for and helping traumatised or suffering people or animals.

One issue is that when times get tough and money gets tight the first target is often training. The old argument that we cannot afford to run training for staff is not just wrong but in this case almost dangerous as more and more staff struggle with all aspects of their lives. Developing skills in psychological and emotional resilience linked with the core concepts of compassion fatigue will be vital.



Of course at present everything is moving online and this again is fully understandable, but we have to be careful that continuing with only online training and E learning could be detrimental to some of our core needs as Human Beings; that of personal face to face contact with others. Together with the very sensitive and personal nature of these subjects where being in contact and working with others at an interpersonal level will be important.



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At the moment it is all about getting through this but equally it is going to be important to recognise the need for training and support. So to all organisations think carefully before saying we cannot afford to do training because some training will simply be the next lifeline for staff and the wellbeing of the organisation.

So I sincerely hope that organisations in all sectors will assess carefully the need for training in these areas. There is no doubt money will be tight but vital training like this will pay off in many ways.

Martin is a Senior Lecturer at Nottingham Trent University and an Independent Training Consultant specialising in resilience and compassion fatigue training across all sectors - you can contact him directly by **email [martin@taking-control.co.uk](mailto:martin@taking-control.co.uk)** or **call 07 973 410 010**

### Why do we need to know about this?

Learning to recognise one's own symptoms of compassion fatigue has a two-fold purpose:

Firstly, it can serve as an important "check-in" process for a helper who has been feeling unhappy and dissatisfied, but did not have the words to explain what was happening to them.

Secondly, it can allow them to develop a warning system for themselves.

