



HEALTH INNOVATIONS

NAME OF PRACTICE: Addressing compassion fatigue among staff in Cancer Care

JURISDICTION: National

HEALTH THEME: Workplace-Healthy

HEALTH SECTOR: Cancer Care

IMPLEMENTATION DATE: 2011

Capital Health's Compassion Fatigue training program was recently recognized by Accreditation Canada as a leading practice.

How do you care for people who are experiencing intense suffering without sacrificing your own health and wellness? This question is at the centre of compassion fatigue training offered to health professionals working in Capital Health's Cancer Care Program.

"Compassion fatigue is a normal consequence of what we do," explains Leslie McLean, who designed and delivers Capital Health's compassion fatigue training program. "We derive immense satisfaction from helping others, and sometimes, the emotional boundaries between you and your patients become blurred, resulting in deep physical and emotional exhaustion."

The signs and symptoms of compassion fatigue include irritability, feelings of frustration and negativity. Without intervention, it can spiral into depression and stress-related illness.

In September 2009, the Cancer Care Program received money through Capital Health's Innovation Fund to pilot compassion fatigue workshops for staff. Leslie attended a train-the-trainer course in Kingston, Ontario, then designed and delivered a full-day compassion fatigue workshop for staff. The workshop introduced staff to the concept of compassion fatigue and engaged them in interactive and introspective work to assess their own stressors. Participants shared their own experiences and explored self-care strategies.

Evaluation of the pilot workshops showed a statistically significant decrease in the degree of compassion fatigue experienced. "The fact that we're recognizing and addressing compassion fatigue has a huge impact on staff," says Leslie.

Feedback from staff has been overwhelmingly positive. Many comments echo the sentiment that, “this workshop should be a mandatory part of Capital Health orientation” and that “it is very useful, important information that needs to be distributed to all health care workers.”

Since the pilot session, Leslie has been offering the workshops twice a month. More than 150 staff members have taken the training to date. Sessions have recently been expanded to include staff from Continuing Care, the Veterans’ Memorial Building and the Intensive Care Unit.

Capital Health has received several requests to share our success in this area. In fact, on March 23, Leslie will conduct a webinar for the Canadian Association of Nurses in Oncology (CANO). For details or to register, visit the CANO website.

CONTACT INFORMATION

NAME: N/A

TITLE: N/A

ORGANISATION: Nova Scotia Health Authority

EMAIL ADDRESS: wearelistening@nshealth.ca

TELEPHONE NUMBER: 1-844-491-5890

Information last updated on: 2017

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