

Mindfulness Practice for Being with Suffering & Grief

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Compassion and Compassion Fatigue

- Healthcare is by nature person-intensive
 - Interpersonal and human connection to those we care for
 - Inspiration: to help others
- Compassion
 - Awareness of and feeling for the pain and suffering of others
 - “impels and empowers people to not only acknowledge, but also act”
- Compassion fatigue
 - Stress response from caring without expected rewards, results, and often closure
 - May result in diminished capacity for empathy / interpersonal engagement

Challenges in Healthcare

- Burnout: cumulative work, demands and stress
- Secondary trauma: dysfunction that arises from prolonged exposure to suffering of others
- Moral distress: moral conflicts when clinician knows what is right but cannot do it
- Horizontal hostility: disrespect among members of a peer group
- Structural violence: violence in the system

Moral Distress and Injury

STRUCTURAL

- Limited resources / inadequate resources
- Lack of adequate informed consent / advance directives
- Time constraints

RELATIONAL

- Conflicts in care between patient, family, clinical team
- Causing pain and feeling guilt
- Futility of interventions
- Death and quality of life

Contemplative Strategies

- Range of reflective practices
 - Mindfulness meditation
 - Compassion practices
 - Somatic exercises
- Self-awareness and recognition of own limitations and suffering
- Commitment to address one's own suffering
- Clarification of values and world view(s)
- Receptivity, compassion, and resilience

Mindfulness

- Research evidence
 - Emotional regulation and improved attention
 - Greater calm and stress reduction
 - Enhanced coping skills
- Befriend pain and/or fear
- Less emotional reactivity / more stability of mind
- Resilience and increased empathy
- Within care-giving interactions for patients, families and caregivers



Taming the Mind



見^二跡



騎^六牛
歸家



得^四牛

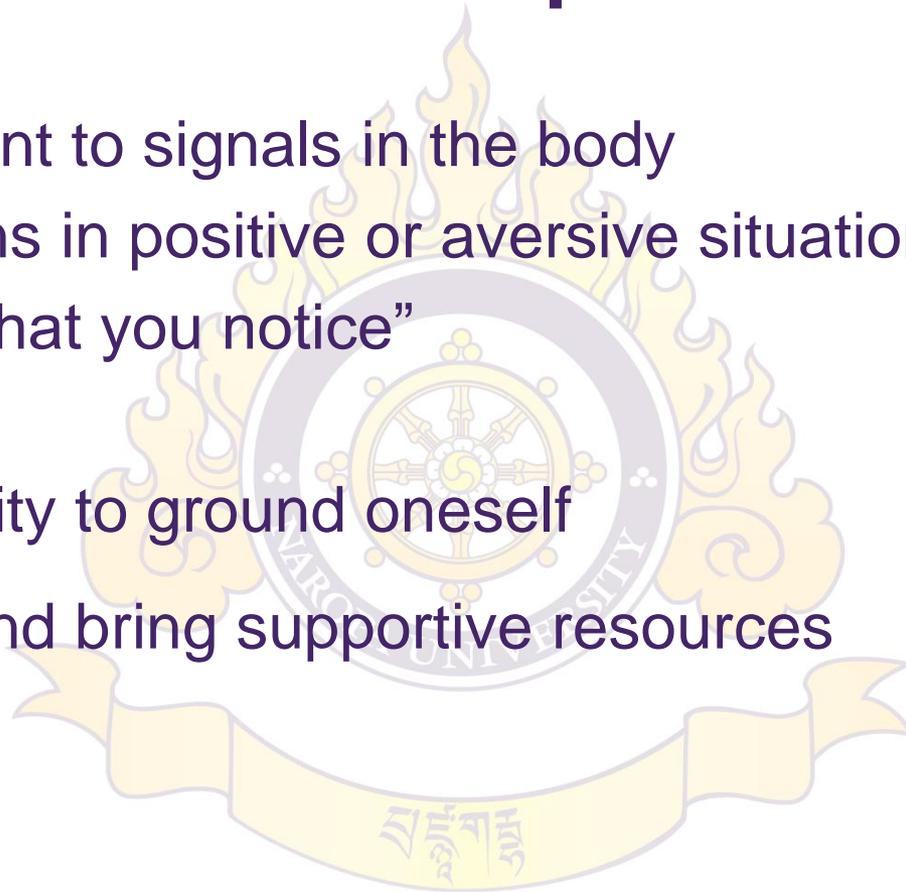
Cultivating Compassion



- For self and others
- Formal and informal practices
- Awareness when struggling with feelings of inadequacy, despair, confusion (mindfulness)
- Responding with kindness and understanding (self-compassion)
- Holding difficult emotions - fear, anger, sadness, shame and self-doubt - and ourselves, in loving awareness

Somatic responses

- Attunement to signals in the body
- Sensations in positive or aversive situations
- “Notice what you notice”
- Opportunity to ground oneself
- Identify and bring supportive resources



When we encounter suffering

- Factors in responding to suffering
- Use of empathy – emotional attunement
- Perspective taking – cognitive attunement
- Memory – personal experience
- Moral sensitivity – moral attunement
- Interrelated and iterative

Self Compassion

- Directed inwards
- Warmth and understanding when we suffer, fail or feel inadequate
- Self kindness
 - Addresses self-criticism, blaming and rumination
- Common humanity
 - We are part of greater humanity that is also suffering
- Mindfulness
 - Counters over-identification and fixation on negative thoughts

Neff, K. D. (2003b). Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. *Self and Identity*, 2, 85-102.

Self Compassion and Caring for Others

- Empathy
 - Affective concern for well-being
 - Capacity to differentiate self from other
 - Ability to regulate own arousal so it becomes resilience rather than overwhelming
 - Boundaries between self and other blur
 - For caregiver, may become over-arousal and aversion
 - Fatigue and depletion



Self Compassion and Caring for Others

- Perspective taking
 - Ability to understand and appreciate unique vantage points of others
 - Cognitive alignment in team-based healthcare
 - Congruence in goals and values between clinicians, patient, family
 - Roles and perspectives of team members may differ
 - i.e. between nurses, surgeon, PCPs



Self Compassion and Caring for Others

- Moral sensitivity
 - Institutional and normative ethics
 - Behavioral ethical guidelines
 - Recognizing conflicts and obligations to respond
 - Ability to locate and articulate source of internal discontent
 - Supports caregiver decision-making

Rushton CH, Kaszniak AW, Halifax JS, Addressing Moral Distress, J Palliative Medicine 16(9), 2013

Re-aligning Ethics and Morals

- Ethics and moral behavior
 - thought and justification of moral guidelines (normative ethics)
 - meaning in moral terms (meta-ethics)
 - specific moral guidelines (applied ethics)
 - how people actually behave (behavioral ethics)
- Life-long relationships with power and influence
- Embedded in all social relationships
- Noticing cognitive, emotional and somatic responses

Thank You!

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