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Care for the caregiver: An integral approach to sustaining wellness and preventing compassion fatigue

Caring for others is a gift. Most people in the health and healing field find a deep sense of meaning in their work and consider it a vocation, a personal and purposeful path. At the same time, giving, caring and healing can take its toll: burnout and compassion fatigue are genuine dangers that can derail or shortcut practitioners' careers. Whether you are a nurse or another care provider, being with the pain and suffering of others cannot only be draining at times but lead to a general sense of overwhelming, disenchantment and exhaustion. This presentation presents a model of holistic and integral intervention in preventing compassion fatigue in health care providers working in the clinic and hospital settings. The integral approach presented here originated out of a need to support psychological, physical and spiritual health and well-being in individuals and groups who are vulnerable to secondary traumatization and chronic stress in the workplace. It involves the use of yoga, guided imagery, breathing techniques, as well as discussions and psycho-education about compassion fatigue and effective self-care. The presentation addresses the use of cognitive and experiential practices to support healthcare providers in better-utilizing self-awareness and boundaries to prevent compassion fatigue.

Biography

Gisele Fernandes is a licensed psychotherapist, clinical supervisor, organizational consultant and graduate school professor. She has extensive training and clinical experience in body-oriented approaches to psychotherapy, using an integrative method that is rooted in somatic, humanistic-existential and transpersonal psychologies. Originally from Brazil, she began her career as a counselor in a hospital setting in Rio de Janeiro. From the beginning, she was interested in the body-mind connection and in holistic ways of understanding and treating the complexities of the mind-body system, both from the patient as well as the provider's perspective. Since 2001, she has been working in the bay area in community mental health and private practice settings. Her therapeutic work integrates sensorimotor trauma approach, attachment-based psychotherapy and mindfulness. She is a core faculty member at the California Institute of Integral Studies and has been teaching in academic settings since 2008.

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