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Resilience a Key to Preventing Burnout among Athletic Trainers and Therapists

Goals for Today's Presentation



1) Identify signs of burnout or compassion fatigue.



2) Define resilience and better understand its importance in clinical practice.



3) Explain resilience's relationship to burnout.



4) Develop strategies to cultivate resiliency to help prevent burnout.

Defining Burnout

- Burnout is a state of **physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion** caused by prolonged stress, often related to work, caregiving, or other demanding responsibilities.
- A syndrome that once was seen as a **byproduct** of **occupational stress** is now viewed as a syndrome that can be impacted by a **person's life, work**, or engagement with **patients/clients**.
- Recent literature finds that 72% of athletic trainers report **moderate** levels of **burnout**.



What does Burnout look like?

- **Personal Burnout**

- General physical and emotional exhaustion not necessarily tied to work.
- Reflects how drained a person feels in life overall.

- **Work-Related Burnout**

- Exhaustion specifically linked to job demands and responsibilities.
- Includes feelings of being worn out or frustrated by work.

- **Client-Related Burnout**

- Fatigue caused by interactions with clients, patients, or students.
- Common in caregiving and service professions.



What is Compassion Fatigue?

A state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged exposure to the suffering of others.



- **Who:** Often experienced by caregivers, healthcare professionals, and those in helping roles, it can lead to reduced empathy, burnout, and decreased effectiveness.
- A 2020 study by Tina Riordan found that **over 80% of athletic trainers** reported moderate to high levels of compassion fatigue.
- **Distinctive characteristics:**
 - Emotional numbness or detachment
 - Increased irritability or frustration
 - Difficulty feeling empathy or compassion
 - Sleep disturbances or fatigue
 - Reduced sense of personal accomplishment

Differentiating Burnout and Compassion Fatigue

| Category | Compassion Fatigue | Burnout |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Emotional Signs | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Heightened emotional sensitivity to others' suffering- Guilt or helplessness- Irritability or emotional numbness | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Cynicism, detachment from work- Decreased sense of accomplishment- Irritability, frustration |
| Cognitive Signs | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Intrusive thoughts about others' trauma- Difficulty concentrating- Preoccupation with clients/patients | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Forgetfulness- Reduced concentration- Negative or critical thinking about work |
| Behavioral Signs | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Withdrawal from social interactions- Avoiding certain clients/cases- Decreased empathy or compassion | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Decreased productivity- Increased absenteeism- Withdrawing from responsibilities |
| Physical Signs | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Fatigue and exhaustion- Sleep disturbances- Headaches, gastrointestinal distress | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Chronic fatigue- Frequent illness- Sleep disruption |

Why is resilience the key to preventing burnout?

- Empowers the person and can shift one's thinking away from victimhood, to **ownership and control**
 - *Most research in our field suggests lack of control or autonomy is a key facilitator to burnout (Oglesby et al. 2020).*
 - *Organizational variables are linked to burnout, while individual variables are associated with prevention (Barrett et al. 2016; Oglesby et al. 2020; Singe et al. 2023).*
- Empowered resilience includes knowing when to rest, say no, or ask for help.
- Resilient individuals learn to see themselves as **capable, adaptable, and resourceful.**



Resilience

- Resilience is the ability to **adapt and bounce back** when faced with stress, adversity, challenges, or setbacks. It doesn't mean avoiding difficulties or never feeling stress; rather, it's about how effectively you cope, recover, and even grow from those experiences.
- **Resilient people have:**
 - **Emotional strength:** staying steady under pressure and managing strong feelings.
 - **Adaptability:** adjusting to new circumstances instead of becoming stuck.
 - **Problem-solving:** finding ways forward rather than giving up.
 - **Growth:** using challenges as opportunities to learn and strengthen coping skills.
- Some people are naturally more resilient, but resilience is also a skill that can be **developed** through strategies like building supportive relationships, practicing optimism, and developing coping techniques.



Resilience and Burnout



Stay Calm Under Pressure → Handle emergencies and high-stakes decisions



Buffer Against Burnout → Manage long hours, stress, and emotional demands



Adaptability → Adjust to changing schedules, athlete needs, and environments

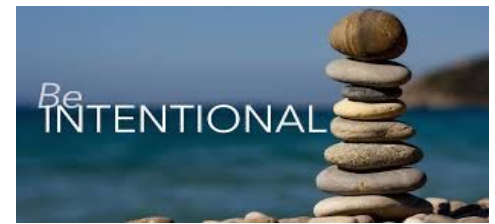


Role Modeling → Demonstrate resilience to co-workers and other members of your community



Sustained Growth → Learn from challenges and maintain career longevity

Intentional Time



- Being **intentional with your time** is a powerful tool for building resilience
- The **MeShift** OR the **ParentShift**: Intentionality with personal time, not associated with parenting or being responsible for someone other than oneself
 - **WHY?** Helps us take care of your own personal needs, before taking care of the needs of others
 - **HOW?** Planning time to do the things that matter most to you
 - Reading, going for a run...
 - Time for yourself is the only part of time
- Other examples of **intentionality**
 - **Digital detox periods:** Time away from screens reduces mental clutter.
 - **Mindfulness practices:** (*Mediation, breathing exercises*)

Mindset



- **Develop a Growth Mindset:** The belief that your abilities and intelligence can be developed with effort, learning, and persistence—takes intentional practice
- **Awareness around negative mindset:** catch yourself when you are thinking ***"I can't handle this."***
- **See challenges as opportunities:** Instead of thinking ***"I can't handle this,"*** try → ***"This is tough, but I can learn from it."***
- **Reframe failures:** Mistakes aren't permanent; they're lessons that help you adapt. ***"I can't do this"*** with → ***"I can't do this yet, but I can improve with practice."***
- **Use the Word "Yet":** This small word emphasizes potential and progress. ***"I don't understand this"*** → ***"I don't understand this yet."***
- **Surround Yourself with Growth-Oriented People:** Seek mentors, peers, or communities that value learning, effort, and resilience

Building my Pack

- Support networks are the web of relationships and resources that individuals can rely on during times of stress, challenge, or growth.
- Our networks help us remain calm, rely on our problem solving, and feel grounded
- Support networks play a critical role in fostering resilience by:
 - **Providing emotional safety** – A safe space to express feelings without judgment.
 - **Offering perspective** – Helping reframe challenges and see possibilities.
 - **Encouraging growth** – Motivating individuals to pursue goals and learn from setbacks.
 - **Reducing isolation** – Combatting loneliness, which can erode resilience.
 - **Sharing resources** – Access to tools, knowledge, and opportunities.



The Art of Pivoting: Building Resilience



- **Pivoting** is the ability to change direction, adapt, and respond effectively when plans, expectations, or circumstances shift. It's not just "going with the flow"—it's a strategic skill that strengthens resilience.



- **Flexibility in action:** Instead of being stuck in frustration or disappointment, you find new ways to move forward.
- **Reduces stress:** When you accept change and adapt quickly, uncertainty feels less overwhelming.
- **Promotes learning:** Pivoting allows you to see challenges as opportunities for growth.
- **Strengthens problem-solving:** Every pivot teaches creative thinking and resourcefulness.



- Team is traveling during a holiday—so your family and friends celebrate the weekend before, and FaceTime on the holiday.
- Patient suffers major injury minutes before the end of practice, and you had a date planned—so instead the date meets you at the hospital.

Mindfulness

- **Mindfulness Focus:** Mindfulness is the practice of paying deliberate, non-judgmental attention to the present moment—your thoughts, feelings, and body sensations.
- **Benefits:**
 - Reduces stress and anxiety by breaking cycles of rumination.
 - Improves focus, decision-making, and emotional regulation.
 - Enhances self-awareness, which helps you notice early signs of fatigue or burnout.
- **Relaxation Routines**
 - **Recommendation:** Dedicate **10–20 minutes daily** to mindfulness, journaling, yoga, or deep breathing exercises.
 - **Recommendation:** Single-task instead of multitask: Give your full attention to what you're doing—whether it's eating, working, or listening to someone.
 - **Why:** Regular relaxation practices reduce stress, improve focus, and strengthen emotional resilience.



Gratitude

- Practice **gratitude** it can help you “see” things differently, more positively
- **Some considerations:** At the end of the day, **name 1–3 things you’re grateful** for. This shifts your attention to the present and to what’s going well.
 - Keep it simple: people, experiences, or even small comforts (like warm tea).
 - When something good happens—even small—pause for 10 seconds to really *notice* and enjoy it.
 - Start your day by thinking of one thing you’re looking forward to or already grateful for.
- Write them down in a journal. Over time, you’ll build a record you can look back on during harder days.



Cultivate Healthy Habits to Improve Resilience

- **Physical Activity**

- **Recommendation:** Aim for **150 minutes of moderate exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise per week**, plus 2–3 strength-training sessions.
- **Why:** Exercise lowers stress hormones and boosts mood-enhancing endorphins.

- **Sleep and Nutrition**

- **Sleep Recommendation:** **7–9 hours per night** for adults; keep a consistent schedule.
- **Nutrition Recommendation:** Eat balanced meals with adequate protein, healthy fats, complex carbs, and plenty of fruits and vegetables; stay hydrated.
- **Why:** Rest and proper nutrition allow the brain and body to cope with challenges, maintain focus, and manage emotions.



Organizational Strategies for Resilience



- Although resilience is individualized, and a person must be committed to fostering it—organizations have a responsibility to cultivate it as well
 - **Health & Well-being Initiatives**
 - Provide wellness programs (fitness, meditation apps, nutrition guidance).
 - Encourage taking breaks, using vacation time, and setting boundaries.
 - **Community & Connection**
 - Build a culture of teamwork and mentorship.
 - Create peer support groups so employees can share strategies and encouragement.
 - **Workload & Flexibility**
 - Ensure reasonable workloads and clear expectations.
 - Offer flexibility in schedules or remote work options when possible, to reduce burnout.
 - **Access to Resources**
 - Offer workshops, coaching, or training on stress management, mindfulness, or resilience skills.
 - Provide access to Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) for confidential counseling.

Summary



- **People with a Growth Mindset:** *They see challenges as opportunities to learn rather than insurmountable obstacles.*
- **Strong Social Support Networks:** *Individuals with family, friends, or mentors who provide encouragement and guidance recover faster from setbacks.*
- **Emotionally Aware Individuals:** *People who recognize and manage their emotions effectively can navigate stress without being overwhelmed.*
- **Adaptable and Flexible Thinkers:** *Those who can pivot and adjust strategies in the face of change are naturally more resilient.*
- **People Who Practice Self-Care:** *Regular sleep, exercise, and stress management routines strengthen physical and mental resilience.*

Thank you

An aerial photograph of the University of Connecticut campus in Storrs, Connecticut. The image shows a mix of historic brick buildings, modern structures, and a large, prominent silver geodesic dome. The campus is surrounded by lush green trees, some of which are showing autumn foliage. The word "UCONN" is overlaid in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the center of the image.

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