Compassion Fatigue in Nurse Educators: A Concept Analysis

Joan M. Owens, PhD, RNC
Jane Tiedt, PhD, RN
Monique De Nysschen, DNP, RN
School of Nursing and Human Physiology, Gonzaga University, Spokane, WA, USA

Purpose: The purpose of this analysis is to develop an understanding of the concept of compassion fatigue as it relates to nurses in academic settings. Nurses are at a known risk of developing vicarious traumatization that may affect professional well-being. The role of nurse educator however, is a profession that has not been well researched as to the risks of and effects of compassion fatigue. The nurse educator profession is currently experiencing a major shortage with a reported 1567 faculty vacancies in schools of nursing across the country (AACN, 2017). According to the NLN (2014), nurse educators work an average of 52 hours per week and that heavy workload impacts job satisfaction keeping faculty attrition high. Dissatisfaction with workload and burnout have been cited as contributing factors to the nurse educator shortage (AACN, 2012; NLN, 2010). According to Shirey (2006), nursing faculty experience stress and burnout not only because of the high job expectations, but also due to the feelings of frustration associated with the perceived inability to satisfy the demands of multiple constituencies. Examining the complexities of burnout leading to compassion fatigue in nurse educators may provide information to help alleviate the nurse educator shortage.

Description of Concept: Compassion fatigue is often linked to other concepts in the literature that add to the confusion surrounding the concept and how it may apply to nurse educators. Compassion fatigue is a state of exhaustion and dysfunction that affects people in giving professions and is a direct result of empathy and over exposure (Figley, 1999 [in Stamm]). It is a state of exhaustion and biological, physical and emotional dysfunction associated with the cost of caring. Nurse educators develop unique relationships with their students, and due to their caring nature, may develop relationships that are immersed in the student, creating a potential for over-exposure to stressful events. The multifaceted role of the nurse educator, which often includes student advisor, clinical instructor, and classroom instructor, provides for multiple opportunities where the educator is exposed to seeing, hearing or discussing traumatic experiences with students. Students often share stressful life events with their faculty and/or advisors or may share as discussion in the classroom or small group setting. A study by Owens (2017) revealed that the nurse educator participants were at risk for having difficulties coping with the trauma they were exposed to through their work with students and/or academia. Ramirez, Isaacson, Smith and Senger (2017) discuss the high levels of anxiety in millennial students and the difficulties nurse educators have developing healthy relationships with these students, noting that enmeshed relationships cause unnecessary stress and anxiety for both parties.

Analysis Process: Walker and Avant model for concept analysis used. Literature search completed using MEDLINE, CINAHL, and PsychINFO utilizing Keywords: Compassion fatigue, secondary stress, nurses, nurse educators, academic, burnout

Concept Linkage to Practice: A clear understanding of compassion fatigue as it relates to nurses in the academic setting will allow for development of best practices to enhance professional well-being for nurse educators. The development of compassion fatigue in the nurse educator may adversely affect the educator's ability to function at their highest level and can affect their ability to remain in the profession. Developing a thorough understanding of the concept as it relates to nurse educators will help to highlight the significance of the issue. Increased exposure of the problem within the profession and in the literature may help educators and their institutions understand compassion fatigue and how to address signs and symptoms before educators must leave the profession due to the biological, physiological and emotional dysfunction that develops, adding to the nurse educator shortage.
Conclusions: It is essential to have a complete understanding of compassion fatigue in order to address prevention and treatment for nurse educators. Compassion fatigue awareness can assist institutions in the development of resiliency training for nurse educators that may help to alleviate the nurse educator shortages.

Title: Compassion Fatigue in Nurse Educators: A Concept Analysis

Keywords: Burnout, Compassion Fatigue and Stress

References:


Abstract Summary: Nurse Educators are at risk of developing compassion fatigue. Research is minimal on compassion fatigue in this population. The multifaceted role creates potential for over-exposure to stressful events. The purpose of this analysis is to develop an understanding of the concept of compassion fatigue as it relates to nurse educators.

Content Outline:
Objectives:

1. Describe compassion fatigue.
2. Identify three concepts linked to compassion fatigue.
3. Identify how compassion fatigue is experienced in nurse educators.

Outline:
1. Introduction
2. Why concept important as related to nurse educators
3. description of concept
4. analysis process
5. model case
6. antecedents & consequences

First Primary Presenting Author

Primary Presenting Author
Joan M. Owens, PhD, RNC
Gonzaga University
School of Nursing and Human Physiology
Assistant Professor
Spokane WA
USA

Professional Experience: Dr. Owens has over 30 years of experience as a registered nurse with a maternal child clinical focus. She has been teaching for the past ten years in graduate and undergraduate programs. Her research is surrounding best practices in education with an emphasis on life balance and healthy work environments for nurse educators.

Author Summary: Dr. Owens is active in STTI, has served as her local chapter Vice President and is a current chapter board member. She has presented at local and national nurse educator conferences on the topics of both life balance and secondary stress (Compassion fatigue) in nurse educators.

Second Secondary Presenting Author

Corresponding Secondary Presenting Author
Jane Tiedt, PhD, RN
Gonzaga University
School of Nursing and Human Physiology
Associate Professor
Spokane WA
USA

Professional Experience: Dr. Tiedt has 35 years' experience in nursing from neonates to end-of-life care. Has 22 years' experience in higher education teaching in undergraduate, graduate and doctoral nursing programs both on-ground and on-line. Has received several faculty teaching awards and continues to serve as a mentor to new faculty in the Department of Nursing. Areas of research include diabetes in Native Americans, cultural competency, nursing stress and burnout and online education.

Author Summary: Dr. Tiedt has 35 years' experience in nursing, with over 20 years in higher education. She is an Associate Professor of Nursing at Gonzaga University focusing on population health, cultural competence, and healthcare quality and safety. Her research interests are in chronic disease management and online education.

Third Author
Monique De Nysschen, DNP, RN
Gonzaga University
School of Nursing and Human Physiology
Lecturer
Spokane WA
USA

Professional Experience: Dr. De Nysschen has 9 years of experience as a registered nurse. She is a full time lecturer in the graduate and undergraduate programs at Gonzaga University. She is part of the
International association of trauma professionals. Her research focus is on compassion fatigue among health care workers, as well as educators.

**Author Summary:** Dr. De Nysschen is passionate about equipping healthcare workers, and educators with tools that will create a balanced and health work environment. She has presented a poster at the WIN conference in 2018 in Spokane WA. She was also asked to be the keynote speaker for a preceptor appreciation event at Washington State University in 2017. She has 5 years of expertise on Compassion fatigue and creating better work environments.