

Compassion Fatigue and Burnout



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Fertility nurses are in the profession of creating life and helping patients navigate a deeply personal and emotional journey. While this career path can be rewarding, it is also inherently challenging and difficult, both intellectually and emotionally. The world of assisted reproductive technology (ART) is increasingly complex and calls upon the IVF nurse to understand many distinct disciplines that are entwined in the IVF experience. This is made even more challenging by the fact that we learn our craft while on the job, implying a steep learning curve to understand all of the components of IVF nursing.

The patient's experience, exacerbated by the current and protracted pandemic, is intrinsically stressful and can place excess demands on the IVF nurse who has the most daily contact with patients. The nurse is often overworked, can feel underappreciated, underprepared, and overwhelmed with the demands and responsibilities of the job.

Compassion is intrinsic to nursing practice. Our profession lends itself to a roller coaster of emotions, from moments of elation to times of disappointment, and other times to grief, potentially placing us at risk of developing compassion fatigue. None of us is immune to compassion fatigue. Fortunately,

understanding what puts us at risk for compassion fatigue can help prevent burnout and possibly worse, leaving our profession.

Furthermore, recognizing the signs of compassion fatigue and understanding the universal nature of the occupational mental health challenge can be important first steps. Sharing suggestions for how to navigate this common experience can offer nurses a foothold to incorporate the changes needed to improve the experience for both ourselves and our patients.

Compassion fatigue can in part be managed by creating open communication with co-workers and administrators to improve the work experience in the hope of providing better patient care and support. This includes valuing and promoting educational programs aimed at offering the nurse a deeper understanding of the foundation knowledge and principles of her role and responsibilities.

Strategies to mitigate compassion fatigue include finding or creating support systems within your organization, fostering productive relationships with colleagues, developing accessible and relevant educational programs, and most importantly, learning how to exercise self-care.

Your patients depend on your support and empathetic guidance. Before you can begin to take care of them, you must prioritize taking care of yourself and become models of self-care during uncertain times.