

Reclaiming Your Happiness at Work: Thriving as a Nurse in 2025 and Beyond



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Nursing Beyond the Job

Objectives

- To gain awareness of the mechanisms of trauma in nursing, how it affects patient care
- To identify 3 symptoms of compassion fatigue
- To learn strategies to restore our own mental health while gaining skills to help our patients do the same.

And to feel like this girl →





Roadmap for the next hour

1. Understand the problem
2. Honor where you are now
3. Become a project manager
4. Don't rewrite the book
5. Rewriting the story
6. Pay it forward

Let's talk about burnout: what does the research show?

Study of 181 nurses with no history of psychological illness (Hamed et al., 2020)

- 88.4% had depression, anxiety, PTSD or burnout syndrome
- PTSD in nurses has high correlation to then developing burnout

Meta-analysis of 94 studies in 30 countries looking at burnout trends over last 10 years (Ge et al., 2023)

- Global prevalence of nursing burnout was 30%

Secondary analysis of cross-sectional survey data more than 3.9 million RNs (Shah et al., 2021)

- 31.5% reported leaving because of burnout
- 68.6% attributed burnout to stressful work environment and 63% reported inadequate staffing

Study of 810 nurses in university hospitals (Mealer et al., 2009)

- 22% had symptoms of PTSD
- 18% met diagnostic criteria
- 86% met criteria for burnout syndrome
- Nurses with both PTSD and BOS had perceptions of difficulty in a variety of areas in their lives



What is the problem



- Trauma. Trauma is the problem.
- “What’s wrong with you” vs. “What happened to you”
- Burnout leads to poor patient outcomes, increase medical errors, nurses leaving the profession
- We don’t WANT to be burned out or moving toward burnout.

So, we need a plan

Secondary Trauma



“the natural consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowledge about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other.

It is stress resulting from helping, or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person” (Figley, 1995)

This comes with signs/symptoms of trauma and trauma responses



What's the solution?

Nursing Process: Assessment

What are the signs and symptoms

Nurses

- Physical S/S: fatigue, lack of sleep, muscle tension, difficulty fulfilling multiple life roles
- Psychological s/s: anxiety, irritability, overwhelm, powerlessness, frustration

Patient (or patient's caregiver)

- Physical s/s: fatigue, sleep disturbance, difficulty getting through ADLs
- Psychological s/s: anxiety, irritability, overwhelm, powerlessness, frustration

Who are these characteristics of?

Fatigue

Loss of
purpose

Injury to
identity

Desire to feel
better

Strained
relationships

Frustration
with self

Abandonment
of other goals

Nurses

- Recurring thoughts or dreaming about a traumatic experiences of patients
- Change in sleep patterns: difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Change in eating habits: overeating or undereating
- Being overly emotionally involved in a patient's case
- Feelings of anger or guilt about the patient's trauma
- Questioning personal beliefs and identity
- Avoiding patients with trauma histories
- Irritability or anger
- Loss of empathy in the long-term
- Agitation (startle effect), fear or despair
- Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed
- Feelings of hopelessness related to work
- Feelings of job inadequacy and lack of satisfaction
- Taking on more work than is necessary and increased overtime
- Problems managing personal boundaries: inability to say no when tired
- Poor relationships: blaming, emotional outbursts, isolating, poor collaboration



Honor where you are now

Are you thriving?



The good news

- ❖ You can experience trauma, and have a trauma response, without developing PTSD
- ❖ Trauma is not a sign of weakness or a moral failing, it is a nervous system response to a stimuli that is too much, too fast.
- ❖ Post-traumatic growth starts with compassion and acceptance.





Compassion

The emotional sensitivity to understand other people's suffering

AND

willingness to help them solve their problems (Lee et al., 2021)

(Lee et al., 2021)

Case Study: Diagnosis and Plan

Starting with compassion, what steps do we take

Patient

- Listen with openness to their lived experience
- Based on this, do an assessment of deficits
- Develop a treatment plan: in small manageable steps. Give them options.
- Help the patient understand the purpose of the plan and how they can build self-efficacy.

Yourself (in the 3rd person if need be)

- Bring some awareness to your own lived experience (hold space without judgment).
- Assess where you think your own deficits may be, things that you may be able to tweak
- Develop a plan: “let’s see what happens if we try”

Become a project manager for your
own recovery: a strategist for your
own thriving

p.s. nurses are already project managers



Compassion Satisfaction

The joy /pleasure derived from helping other people based on nursing knowledge.

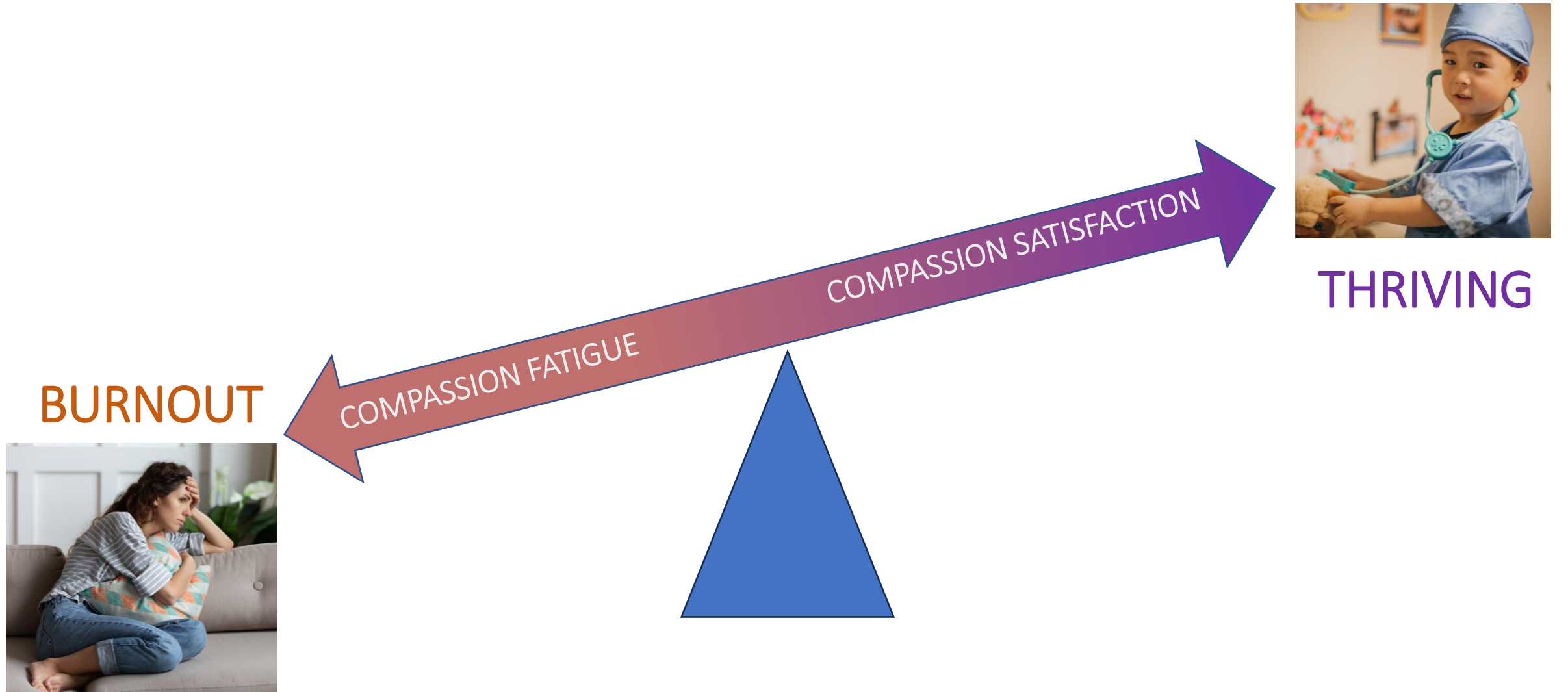
Prevents AND treats trauma

Source of strength to drive nurses to continue to work despite the high levels of stress

Positive feeling regarding social and work relationships

Emotional state that mitigates secondary traumatic stress

But before we panic... It's a continuum, not a destination





How do we gain
compassion
satisfaction?

Don't rewrite the book

But maybe rewrite the story 😊



It's not
about fault,
it's about
control.

Consider changing
your story (or at
least giving equal
airtime)

There are lots of
stories, all of
them may have
some truth

Choose-
your-own
adventure

STRATEGY
Use powerful
questions if you
feel stuck with
coming up with
a better story.

Let's think about the story

Case Study: Plan and Implementation

where do we start?

Nurse (aka you)

- Don't underestimate the value of small steps
- Build the support you need
- Lean in, not out: aka: find meaning

Patient or parent

- Support the patient with making small steps, celebrating success and problem-solving obstacles
- Identify who can support them while they try
- Help them anchor into a reason, a WHY for getting better



What exactly have the smart people figured out?

Start with why

Lean in not out

Reframe

Gratitude and savoring

Team

Stay involved

Don't forget about
your awesome bod...

Study of nurse
managers

Progressive relaxation
1x/week x 8 weeks



Compassion Fatigue
Scores and
Burnout Scores

progressive relaxation

Hand	Clench left hand and feel the tension. Relax and let hand hang loosely. Same for right hand
Wrists	Bend hand back, hyper-extending wrists. Relax
Upper arm	Bend elbow toward shoulders and tense biceps muscle. Relax
Shoulders	Bring shoulders up toward ears. Relax; let shoulders drop down
Forehead	Wrinkle forehead, raise eyebrows. Relax
Eyes	Close eyes tightly. Relax
Neck	Turn head so that chin is over right shoulder. Straighten and relax
Neck and jaws	Bend head forward, pressing chin against chest. Straighten and relax
Abdomen, back, thighs	Tighten stomach muscles. Relax Arch back. Relax Stretch legs in front of you. Tighten thigh muscles. Relax
Hamstrings	Push heels down into floor, tighten hamstring muscles. Relax
Calves, feet	Point toes toward head. Relax Curl toes toward the bottom of feet. Relax

Duration of clenching of muscles 7-10 sec and relaxation of muscles 15-20 sec as per protocol



Mindfulness refers to the practice of learning to focus attention and awareness on the moment-by-moment experience with an attitude of curiosity, openness and acceptance.

Case Study: Outcomes and Evaluation

what are the results?

Nurse

- Stop and take a look.
- What worked, what didn't, what would you do differently?
- Ask some powerful questions and let your brain do the work.

Patient

- If it worked, great! Keep going or identify what the next best step would be.
- If it didn't work, go back and try another approach, get some support, solve for the unforeseen obstacles.

Where are
the ripples?



This isn't self care for
the sake of having
some time in a
bathtub or getting a
massage, this is
nursing self-care to
change the world.





Moral of the story

- Stress and potential for trauma are an inherent part of the nursing role. Both are treatable.
- This means nothing is wrong with you and you are not alone.
- We can use the nursing strategies that we use with our patients on ourselves.
- We have what we need inside of us and as a group to thrive, right now, today.

NURSING
BEYOND THE JOB

Let's Connect

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