Compassion Re-Imagined: The  of Healing

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I do not have any conflict of interest related to this presentation.

I completed Compassion Training (CBCT) at Emory's Center for Contemplative Science and Compassion Based Ethics

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They saw "something"
on her mammogram.

Learning Objectives

1	2	3	4
• Examine differences between compassion and empathy.	• Describe evidence linking compassion to improved patient outcomes.	• Appreciate benefits of compassion to healthcare provider wellbeing.	• Identify strategies that foster compassionate care.

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WHAT

WHAT

- Definitions
- Challenges

WHY

HOW

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WHAT

Empathy

Empathy: *"The action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner."*

https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/empathy

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WHAT

Empathy as a Basis for Compassion

An Evolutionary Psychology Model of Empathy*

- Cognitive Empathy – cognitive understanding
- Affective Empathy – somatic, emotional experience
- Empathetic Concern – other-oriented, discerning

* Drawn from Primatologist Franz de Waal's *Age of Empathy*

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WHAT Compassion

THREE ASPECTS:

1. Cognitive
Awareness / understanding of someone's suffering

2. Affective
Feeling of warm-heartedness and closeness

3. Motivational
Desire / wish to alleviate the suffering

a **warm-hearted** concern that unfolds when we witness the suffering of others and feel motivated to relieve it

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WHAT

Three Orientations of Compassion



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WHAT

Self-Compassion



Mindfulness



Self-Kindness



Common Humanity

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WHAT

Compassion Crisis

70% of opportunities for compassion are missed by Physicians

50% of Americans believe our HCP aren't compassionate

Two thirds of patients have had meaningful HC experience without compassion

Compassion comprises less than 1% of communications with patients



Fernando AT 3rd, Consedine NS. Barriers to Medical Compassion as a Function of Experience and Specialization: Psychiatry, Pediatrics, Internal Medicine, Surgery, and General Practice. *J Pain Symptom Manage*. 2017;53(6):979-987. doi:10.1016/j.jpainsymman.2016.12.324

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WHAT

Innovation & Technology: Threats to compassionate care



Katsnelson G, Brenna CTA. The heart of anaesthesiology: revitalising humanism in the age of technology. *Br J Anaesth*. 2024;132(1):1-4. doi:10.1016/j.bja.2023.09.026v

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WHAT

Compassion ↓ in Medical School

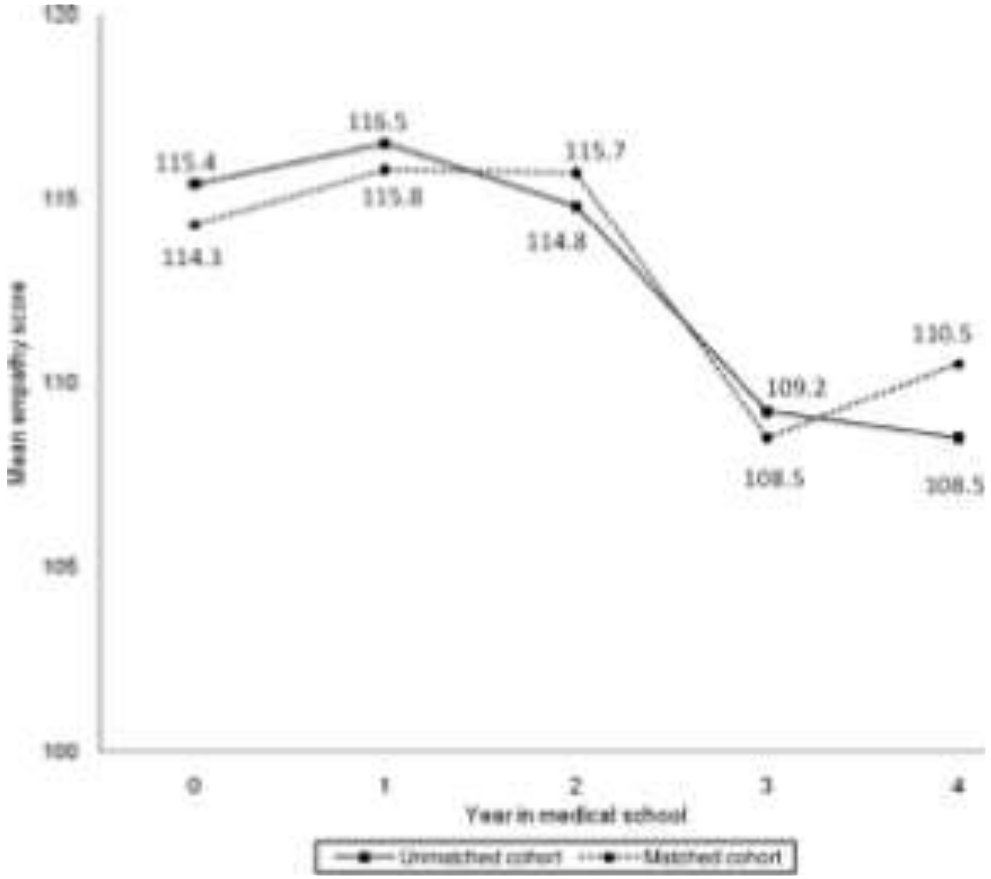


Figure 1 Changes in mean Jefferson Scale of Physician Empathy (JSPE) scores in different years of medical school for the matched cohort (*n* = 121), who identified themselves at all five administrations of the JSPE, and the unmatched cohort (*n* = 335) at Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2002–2008.

Hojat M, Vergare MJ, Maxwell K, et al. The devil is in the third year: a longitudinal study of erosion of empathy in medical school. *Acad Med*. 2009;84(9):1182-1191. doi:10.1097/ACM.0b013e3181b17e55

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WHY

WHAT

WHY

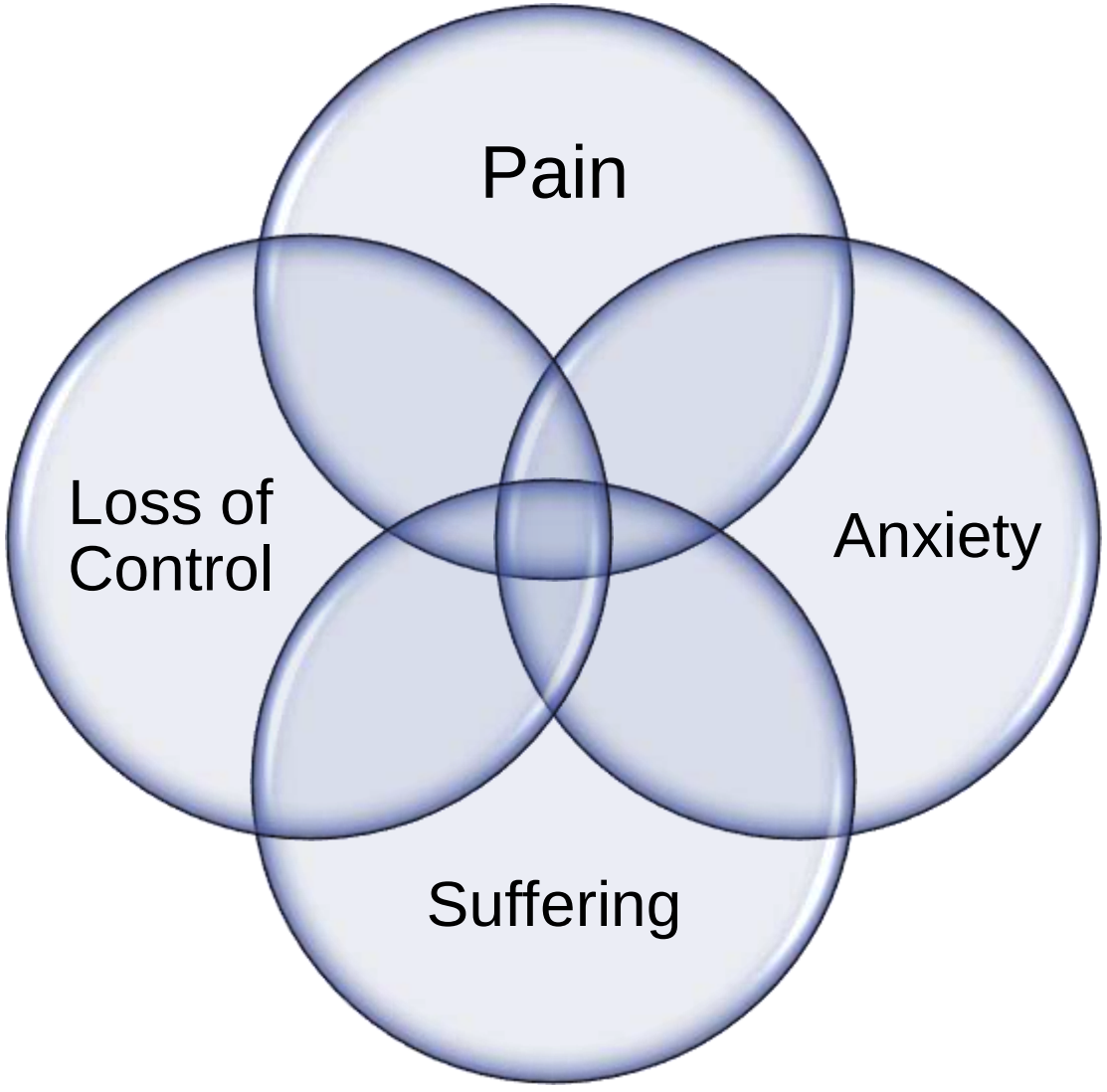
- Relevance
- Science
- Benefits

HOW

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WHY

Pain Management & Compassion



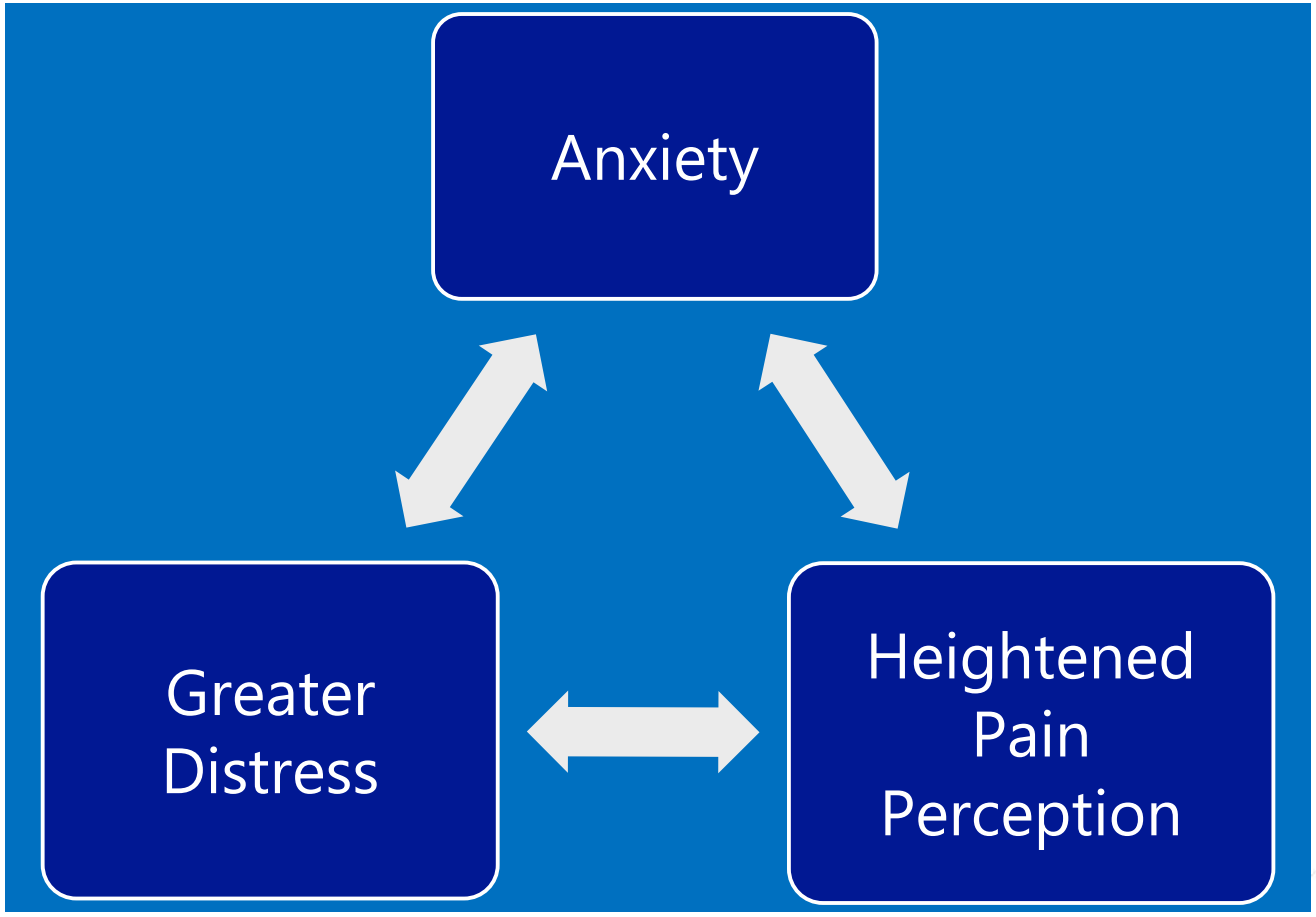
Compassion→

Trust
Procedural cooperation
Analgesic efficacy
Satisfaction

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WHY

Anxiety, Pain Management & Compassion



Ni K, Zhu J, Ma Z. Preoperative anxiety and postoperative adverse events: a narrative overview. Anesthesiology and Perioperative Science. 2023;1(3):23.

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WHY

Compassion of Anesthesiologists and Postoperative Outcomes



ORIGINAL CLINICAL RESEARCH REPORT

Is the Compassion of Anesthesiologists Associated With Postoperative Pain and Patient Experience? A Prospective Cohort Study

Ludmil V. Mitrev, MD,*† Gabrielle R. Chin, PhD,‡ Brian W. Roberts, MD, MSc,§† Noud van Helmond, MD, PhD,* Keyur C. Trivedi, MD,*† Nicholas J. Libraro, BS,† Dhaval D. Rana, DO,* John E. Dibato, PhD,‖ Stephen Trzeciak, MD, MPH,¶ Alann R. Solina, MD,*† and Jeffrey M. Greeson, PhD‡#

Mitrev, L. V., Chin, G. R., Roberts, B. W., van Helmond, N., Trivedi, K. C., Libraro, N. J., Rana, D. D., Dibato, J. E., Trzeciak, S., Solina, A. R., & Greeson, J. M. (2025). Is the Compassion of Anesthesiologists Associated With Postoperative Pain and Patient Experience? A Prospective Cohort Study. *Anesthesia and analgesia*, *140*(5), 1040–1047

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WHY

Considering Our Blind Spots



Paul-Savoie E, Bourgault P, Potvin S, Gosselin E, Lafrenaye S. The Impact of Pain Invisibility on Patient-Centered Care and Empathetic Attitude in Chronic Pain Management. Pain Res Manag. 2018 Sep 24;2018:6375713. doi: 10.1155/2018/6375713. PMID: 30344801; PMCID: PMC6174788.

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WHY

Empathy for Chronic Pain

"Empathy is a therapeutic agent – more impactful than many standard pain interventions"

Higher Empathy correlated with:

↓ pain

↓ disability

↑ HRQOL



Licciardone JC, Tran Y, Ngo K, Toledo D, Peddireddy N, Aryal S. Physician Empathy and Chronic Pain Outcomes. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2024;7(4):e246026. Published 2024 Apr 1. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.6026

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WHY

Self-Compassion: A Necessity for Patients in Pain

Self Compassion Benefits:

↑ pain acceptance
↑ activity engagement
↓ catastrophizing
↓ distress
↓ disability

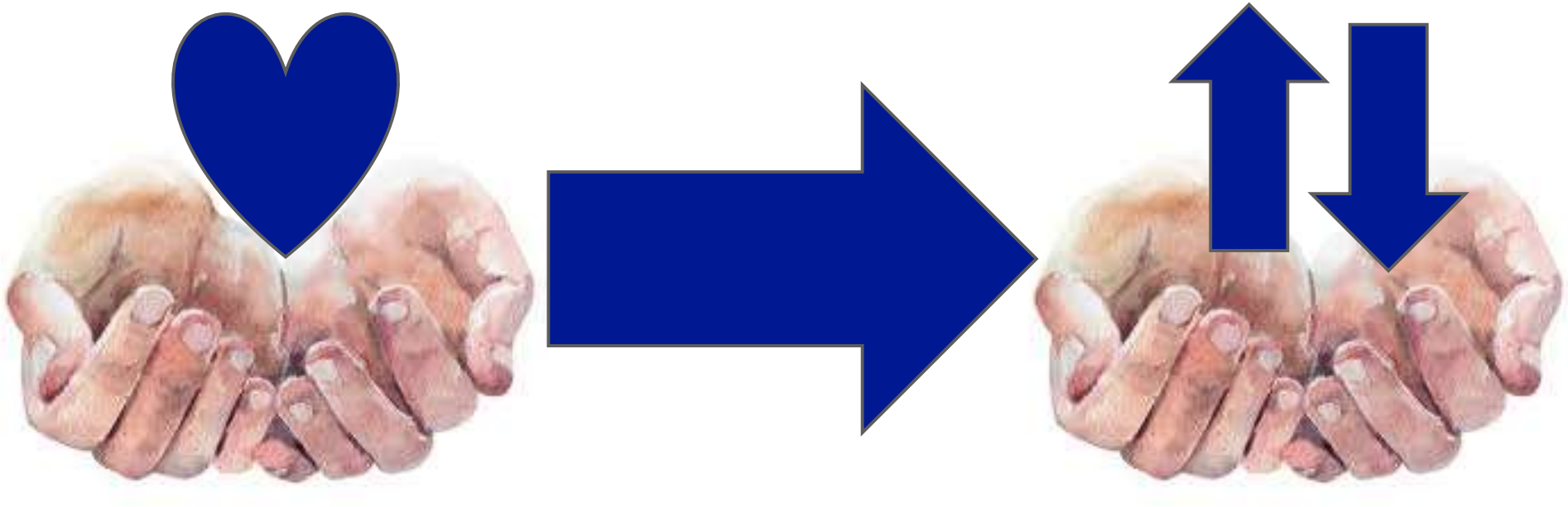


Lanzaro C, Carvalho SA, Lapa TA, Valentim A, Gago B. A Systematic Review of Self-Compassion in Chronic Pain: From Correlation to Efficacy. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology.* 2021;24:e26. doi:10.1017/SJP.2021.22

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WHY

Self-Compassion: A Necessity for Compassionate Care



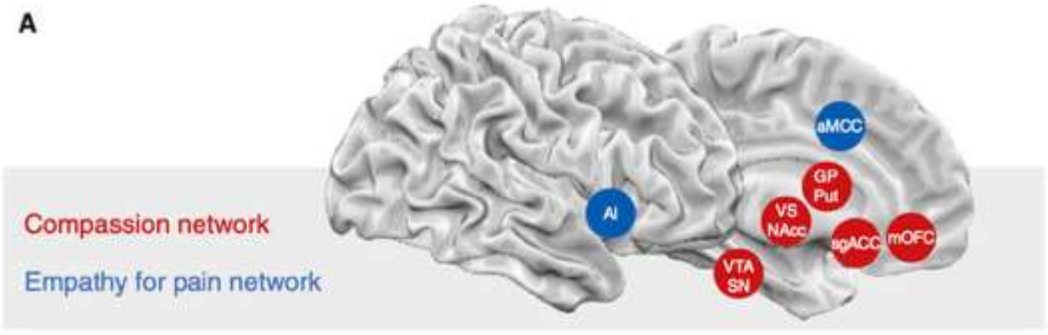
Nasika IN, Wiart C, Bonvarlet AS, Guillaume J, Yavchitz A, Tereno S. Attachment patterns, self-compassion, and coping strategies in patients with chronic pain. *Pain Rep*. 2023;8(5):e1087. Published 2023 Aug 18. doi:10.1097/PR9.0000000000001087

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WHY

Neuroscience of Compassion

Compassion Activates Reward Centers



Klimecki OM, Leiberg S, Lamm C, Singer T. Functional Neural Plasticity and Associated Changes in Positive Affect After Compassion Training. *Cerebral Cortex*. 2012;23(7):1552-1561. doi:10.1093/cercor/bhs142

Singer T, Klimecki . "Empathy and Compassion." Current Biology Vol 24 No 18 R876



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WHY

Three Hallmarks of BURNOUT

Physical and emotional exhaustion

Depersonalization – objectification and disconnection

Perceived lack of efficacy

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WHY

The Impact of Depersonalization

- Disconnection from patients
- Disconnection from purpose
  - The erosion of the very purpose that led to the aspiration of a career in healthcare
  - Conducive to empathic distress (self-blaming and shaming)

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WHY

Empathic Distress

- Empathic distress is a strong, negative, and self-focused response to another person's suffering. It can lead to a desire to withdraw from the situation to protect oneself from negative feelings.

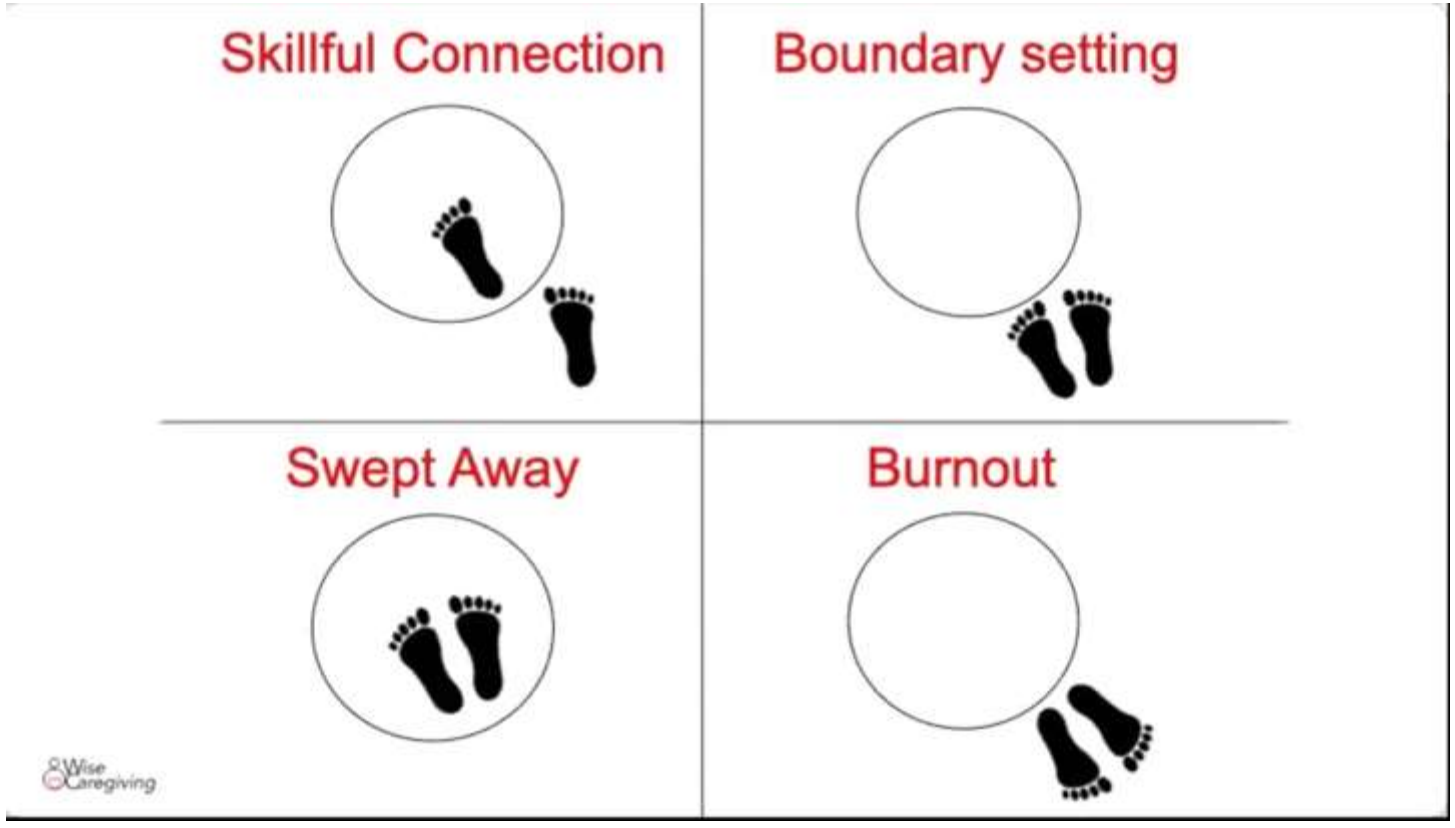
- With empathy there is attachment to outcome, an urge to “fix” resulting from the unbearable suffering resulting from empathic resonance

- Lack of wisdom to recognize that outcomes result from multiple factors so many of which beyond one’s control

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WHY

Empathic Distress



Empathic Distress leads →

UNSKILFUL CONNECTIONS

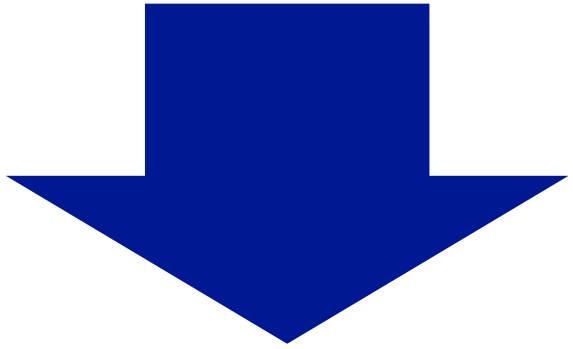
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WHY

Burnout & Compassion



Burnout

Compassion



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WHY

The Benefits of COMPASSION: Healthcare Workers



↑ PNS
↑ Happiness
↑ Endorphins
↑ Oxytocin
↓ Stress Response
↓ Inflammation

Lamothe M, Boujut E, Zenasni F, Sultan S. To be or not to be empathic: the combined role of empathic concern and perspective taking in understanding burnout in general practice. *BMC Fam Pract*. 2014;15:15. Published 2014 Jan 23. doi:10.1186/1471-2296-15-15

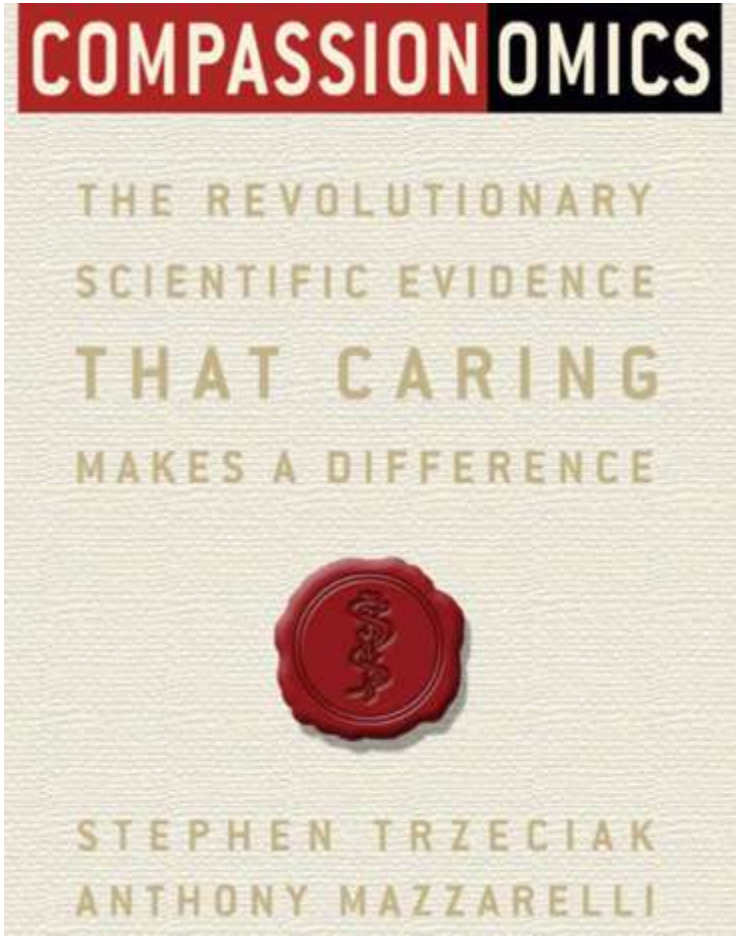
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WHY

Economic Value of Compassion

Organizational Benefits:

- ↓ healthcare utilization
- ↓ complaints
- ↓ litigation risk



Trzeciak S, Roberts BW, Mazzarelli AJ. Compassionomics: Hypothesis and experimental approach. *Med Hypotheses*. 2017;107:92-97. doi:10.1016/j.mehy.2017.08.015

- Improves the well-being of providers
- Improves clinical outcomes of patients
- Positively Impacts the finances of healthcare systems by reducing burdensome expenses

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WHY

Obstacles to Compassion?

- Unmanaged distress
- Compassion is a soft skill, and not helpful
- Fear of cost of caring (~~compassion fatigue~~)
- Organizational barriers
- ~~Time constraints~~
- Burnout
- Systemic pressures



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HOW

WHAT

WHY

HOW

- self compassion
- practical compassion skills
- compassion training

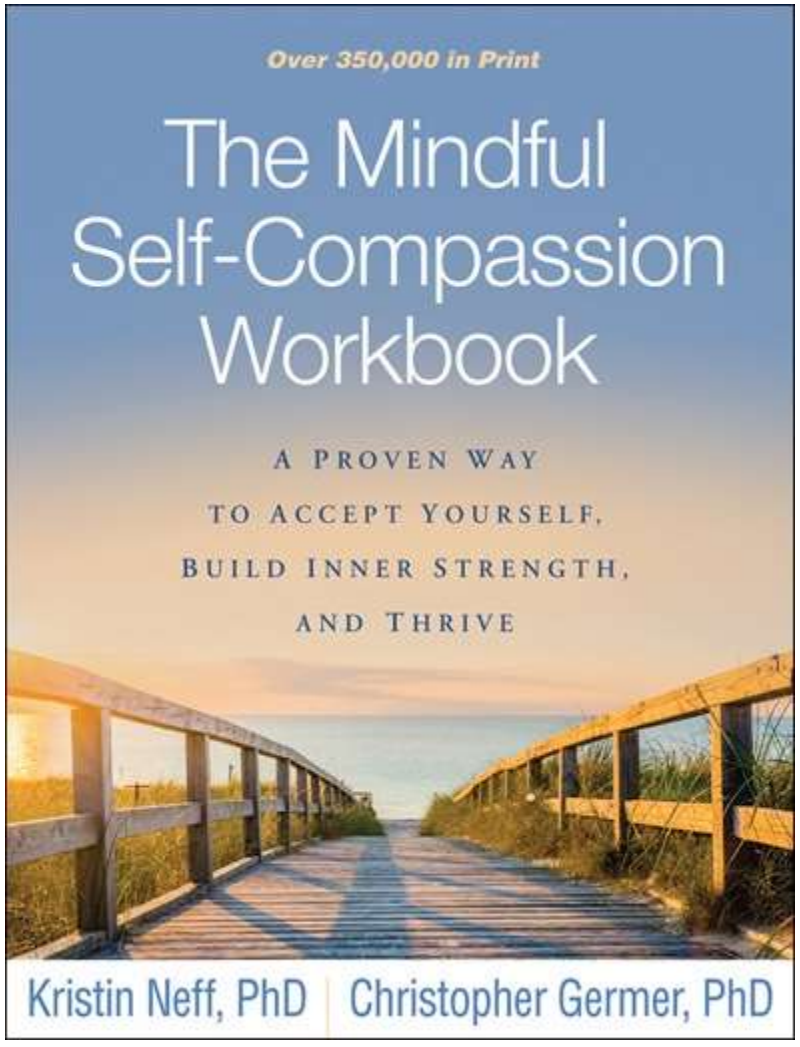
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HOW

Self-Compassion

- Mindful practices
- Positive Affirmations
- Meditation
- Grounding practices
- Self-compassion Break





https://self-compassion.org/self-compassion-practices/

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HOW

How & Where Should We Start?

- Clinic Visits
- Pre-procedure visits
- Communication
- Follow-up's



Liossi C, Howard RF. Pediatric Chronic Pain: Biopsychosocial Assessment and Formulation. *Pediatrics*. 2016;138(5):e20160331. doi:10.1542/peds.2016-0331

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HOW

ONLY 40 Seconds

"We're going to be here with you. We're going to go through this together. I'll be with you every step of the way."

"I know that this is a tough experience to go through, and I want you to know that I'm here with you and that some of the things that I say may be difficult to understand, so I want you to feel comfortable stopping me if something I say is confusing or doesn't make sense. And we're here together and we'll go through this together."



"I know this is a tough time. It's a tough time for you, and I want to emphasize, again, that we're in this together and that we'll be here with you at every step of the way."

Fogarty, L. A., Curbow, B. A., Wingard, J. R., McDonnell, K., & Somerfield, M. R. (1999). Can 40 seconds of compassion reduce patient anxiety?. *Journal of clinical oncology : official journal of the American Society of Clinical Oncology*, *17*(1), 371–379. https://doi.org/10.1200/JCO.1999.17.1.371

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HOW

Practical & Clinical Skills

- Active Listening
- Mindfulness
- Validation
- Compassionate communication phrases



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HOW

Compassion Practices

- Mindful Self Compassion
- Compassion Focused Therapy
- Compassion Meditation

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HOW

Mindful Self-Compassion

MSC outperformed CBT :

↑ Self-compassion ($p < 0.05$)
↑ Pain acceptance ($p < 0.01$)
↓ Pain interference ($p < 0.05$)
↓ Catastrophizing (trend $p < 0.10$)
↓ Anxiety ($p < 0.05$)



Torrijos-Zarcero M, Mediavilla R, Rodríguez-Vega B, et al. Mindful Self-Compassion program for chronic pain patients: A randomized controlled trial. *Eur J Pain*. 2021; 25: 930–944. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejp.1734

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HOW

Compassion Focused Therapy

THE BRITISH PAIN SOCIETY
EXPERTISE WHERE IT MATTERS

Article

'All these things don't take the pain away but they do help you to accept it': making the case for compassion-focused therapy in the management of persistent pain

Hannah Gooding[1,2], Jacqui Stedmon[2] and Doug Crix[3]

British Journal of Pain
2020, Vol 14(1) 31–41
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HOW

Compassion Meditation

Compassion meditation reduces pain severity and increases pain acceptance.

Integrate compassion-focused practices in chronic pain care to enhance outcomes beyond traditional cognitive or pharmacologic strategies.



Chapin HL, Darnall BD, Seppala EM, Doty JR, Hah JM, Mackey SC. Pilot study of a compassion meditation intervention in chronic pain. *Journal of Compassionate Health Care*. 2014/10/27 2014;1(1):4. doi:10.1186/s40639-014-0004-x

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HOW

Medical & Allied Health Training

- Curricular Innovations
- Simulation & Reflection
- Mentorship & Recognition
- Well-being Integration
- Narrative Medicine



Hojat M, Vergare MJ, Maxwell K, et al. The devil is in the third year: a longitudinal study of erosion of empathy in medical school. *Acad Med*. 2009;84(9):1182-1191. doi:10.1097/ACM.0b013e3181b17e55

Canales, C., Strom, S., Anderson, C. T., Fortier, M. A., Cannesson, M., Rinehart, J. B., Kain, Z. N., & Perret, D. (2019). Humanistic medicine in anaesthesiology: development and assessment of a curriculum in humanism for postgraduate anaesthesiology trainees. *British journal of anaesthesia*, *123*(6), 887–897. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bja.2019.08.021

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HOW

Compassion Training Programs

- Applied Compassion Training (ACT)
- Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT)
- Cognitively-Based Compassion Training (CBCT)
- Mindful Self Compassion (MSC)
- Loving Kindness Meditation (LKM) and Compassion Meditations (CM)

CBCT
Compassion Training

compassioninstitute

STANFORD UNIVERSITY
COMPASSION PROJECT

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KEY POINTS

- Compassion training mitigates empathic distress
- Skillful connections mitigate depersonalization/disconnection and empathetic distress → mitigates against burnout
- Skillful connections require compassion with equanimity
- Self-compassion protects from perceived lack of efficacy

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Thank You!

leelach@uic.edu

"If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion"

-Dalai Lama

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