Compassion Fatigue in Acute Care Nurses  
Linda B. Cain, PhD, RN  
Bellarmine University  
Paula R. Carmouche

**Problem:** Nurses are at high risk for compassion fatigue and eventual burnout, which can negatively influence all areas of health. Meeting the care needs of patients and families facing life-threatening or end-of-life illnesses requires physical energy, mental focus, and compassion in every interaction.

**Evidence:** Very few interventions to address compassion fatigue are reported. Three categories of interventions identified in the literature as important in addressing compassion fatigue, i.e. work/life balance, education, and work environment programs, were incorporated into this study.

**Strategy:** An 8-week pilot intervention was carried out with the RN staff on an acute neuroscience unit:

- **Phase I**
  - Cognitive distinction among compassion wellness, compassion fatigue, and burnout
  - Recognizing compassion fatigue or burnout in oneself and others
  - Maintaining compassion wellness
- **Phase II**
  - Physical wellness strategies
  - Nutritional wellness strategies
  - Stress management
- **Phase III**
  - Importance of emotional and spiritual wellbeing in maintaining compassion wellness
  - Strategies for maintaining emotional and spiritual wellbeing
- **Phase IV**
  - Recognizing work environment factors that contribute to compassion wellness
  - Strategies for promoting healthy team communication and dynamics

**Practice Change:** The intervention was aimed at promoting a healthy work environment that recognizes and addresses compassion fatigue.

**Evaluation:** Two instruments were used pre/post intervention: (a) Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL) with subscales of compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue, and (b) Life Balance Scales, consisting of likert scales for emotional, physical, social, spiritual, and overall balance in one’s life.
**Results:** Fifteen nurses responded to both the pre and post surveys. Data were analyzed using paired t-test. Overall Life Balance was significantly more positive (p<.05) post-test. Differences in ProQOL scores did not reach significance.

**Recommendations:** Further investigation of interventions to address compassion fatigue in acute care environments is needed.

**Lessons Learned:** Unit-based interventions can be effective in assisting nurses with strategies to maintain healthy life balance, which can contribute to compassion satisfaction.

**Bibliography:**


