Interventions to Manage Compassion Fatigue in Oncology Nursing

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Work-related stress emanating from close interpersonal contact with patients with cancer and their families may result in physical, emotional, social, and spiritual adversity for oncology nurses. The negative result of this cumulative distress has historically been referred to as burnout. However, this dated term does not truly depict the result of the longitudinal workplace ramifications of sadness and despair on nursing staff. This article proposes that the phrase compassion fatigue replace the outdated notion of burnout in describing this phenomenon. Although not clearly and uniformly described in the literature, this occurrence is seen regularly in clinical practice and is conceptually known by nurses. Limited information is available about interventions to manage compassion fatigue; therefore, a national survey was conducted to identify resources available to oncology nurses to counter this phenomenon. Participants provided information about the availability of interventions in three major categories: on-site professional resources, educational programs, and specialized retreats. The availability of resources ranged from 0%–60%. Survey findings, along with narrative comments by respondents, provide relevant information for oncology nurses and their employers. By recognizing the perils of inattention to this frequent nursing phenomenon and the scope of existing workplace options that may augment nurse coping, oncology nurses’ recognition and management of this entity may be enhanced. Organizations also may be encouraged to periodically inventory their support and lobby for workplace interventions to manage this critical work-related issue.

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