



Healthcare workers need compassion, now more than ever.

The rise of pandemic related compassion fatigue and burnout has contributed to a perfect storm that is profoundly impacting our first responders nationwide. Below we call attention to these stressors and provide suggestions for coping.

Compassion and burnout, it's not what you think. Even before the pandemic, first responders faced higher levels of stress, which resulted in depression, PTSD, and burnout (Beary, 2017). How do we combat this? Stephen Trzeciak, MD, MPH, and Anthony Mazzairelli, MD, JD, MBE reviewed 1,000 scientific abstracts and 250 research papers, and found that increased compassion improves clinical outcomes, decreases burnout, and stimulated resilience in health care providers (Trzeciak & Mazzairelli, 2017). "When health care providers take the time to make human connections that help end suffering, patient outcomes improve and medical costs decrease. Among other benefits, compassion reduces pain, improves healing, lowers blood pressure and helps alleviate depression and anxiety" (Ritchie, 2019).

Multiple experiments demonstrated that compassion from a doctor or nurse in the pre-op environment required less anesthesia during, and less pain medication post-surgery. Physicians who rated higher in compassion found patients were more adherent to taking medicine and dramatically lowered the odds of being referred to a specialist or diagnostic testing. As we know, even before the pandemic, about 50% of providers showed some sign of burnout. In fMRIs, engaging in compassionate care lit up the reward and positive emotion centers in the brain. Those who impart compassion benefit more than those who don't. According to Mazzairelli, (2019) less than one minute of compassion (a mean of 40 seconds!) reaps rewards. He posits, "compassion can be the wonder drug of the 21st century."

Begin with self-compassion. This all sounds great, right? But it has to start with self-compassion. The Dalai Lama is famous for saying, "If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion." It's not as hard as may sound. There are simple, effective steps you can take to cultivate it. Ackerman (2020) compiles a list exercises to improve self-compassion and increase overall compassion. For example, when navigating challenges, how would you apply the advice you are giving yourself, to someone you cared about? She gives suggestions on increasing mindfulness through self-compassion breaks, explorative writing prompts, meditation and getting to the heart of what we really want. The article with PDF's can be found here: <https://positivepsychology.com/self-compassion-exercises-worksheets/>.

Resilience and adaptability are key. New routines, while initially stressful, offer new areas for insight and growth. Resilience is choosing what's right while moving forward in tough times. Routinely check in with peers to promote health care workers inherent resilient nature. Greco (2020) compiled a list: [10 tips for emergency responders, healthcare providers for managing stress during the COVID-19 crisis](#). It includes quick and useful tips such as accepting your limitations, meditation, exercise, sleep, hydration, news-fasts, and confiding in someone you trust. For example, something as basic as connecting with your pet. Research has regularly shown that the mere act of petting an animal reduces stress, decreases blood pressure and improves mood (Greco, 2020). Silver Hill's COVID-19 Resiliency Campaign (CRC) works with agencies and support networks throughout the community to offer direct services to frontline workers in need of support. Based at Silver Hill Hospital, the CRC offers education and training to law enforcement agencies, hospitals, skilled nursing and assisted living facilities. We do this by way of providing Town Hall Forums on COVID-19, well-being, coping strategies and tips on resiliency during the pandemic. Our goal is to support you in maintaining physical and mental well-being in these unprecedented times.

<https://silverhillhospital.org/covid19resilience/>



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