Professional self-care in the aftermath of disaster

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Importance of professional self-care

• It is distressing to be with children who are in distress
• It’s critical healthcare providers find ways to have their own personal needs met and appreciate and address impact of supporting children who are grieving or traumatized
• Create a culture where:
  – it is ok to be upset
  – members normalize asking for help and model willingness to accept assistance
Compassion fatigue

• Exposure to trauma and suffering of patients can lead to compassion fatigue
  – Empathy: understanding and taking perspective of patient
  – Compassion: requires empathy but includes wanting to help and/or desiring to relieve suffering – “to bear or suffer together”

• Warnings about compassion fatigue imply that compassion is necessarily tiring

• Compassionate approaches can be gratifying and buffer against physician stress
Supporting those most in need can be gratifying

- Realistic objectives of purpose of interactions
- Healthcare providers have skills and resources to provide meaningful assistance
- Healthcare providers are aware of and have sufficient support to deal with personal impact of work
- Especially difficult in austere environment and when you have other challenges
Common emotional reactions to crisis

- Ambivalence or conflicting emotions
- Anxiety
- Confusion
- Shame, lowered self-esteem
- Anger or irritability
- Distrust or suspiciousness
Other common reactions

- Physical
- Behavioral
- Cognitive
- Interpersonal
- Spiritual

- Reactions are often misinterpreted → blaming, withdrawal and anger
Support for Staff

• Organizational support
  – Additional support staff
  – Modify workload, expectations, schedule
  – Supportive supervision
  – Professional Development
  – Employee Assistance Program
• Family and peer support
• Religion and spirituality
Domains for professional self-care
(adapted from US DOE Compassion Fatigue)

• Physical
• Intellectual – cultivate creative abilities; respectful humor
• Occupational
• Environmental
• Emotional
• Social
• Spiritual
Challenges to self-care

• Making time when there is so much to do and everyone needs your help
• Feeling shame or guilt for attending to your own needs
• Assuming others are having less trouble adjusting
• Lack of modeling of professional self-care