

Caring

Betty Healey posed the question, “Is the cost of caring too much?” (oohna journal Spring 2007). Within health care, the intensity of work, amplified with both care requirements and staffing reductions/shortages is leading to a phenomenon called “compassion fatigue”. Brenda Sabo (Dalhousie University) reported (*International Journal of Nursing Practice June 2006*), the rise of emotional and health related problems now being experienced by Canadian nurses are a result of this. Men and women who seek careers in health care professions often view “self-care” as a selfish act.

Dr. Melmet Oz, a well-known American cardiologist, is quoted with the following story to relay the importance of self-care and self first: *“All of us know that our heart is the source of life, beating strongly inside of us, sending nutrients and oxygen to every part of the body. The heart also receives back the circulated blood and sends this to the lungs to be re-oxygenated and cleaned so the cycle can begin again. The cleansed blood leaves the heart through the ascending aorta, a large blood vessel that serves as the super highway of life. The first branch or exit from this highway is the cardiac artery, which goes directly back to the heart, keeping the heart muscle strong and healthy so that it can continue to pump and serve the rest of the body. What the heart knows is that it must stay strong and vibrant if it is to serve the needs of the entire body, and that to do so it must feed itself first.”*

The lesson – each of us must care for ourselves first so we can stay strong and healthy for those whom we serve. Compassion must begin at home, with the self, to avoid ‘compassion fatigue’.

Compassion Begins with Me

Remember self-care is not a selfish act. Your health is critical in sustaining you and allowing you to fulfill your professional responsibilities in a sustainable way. Some strategies to build into your life:

- **Take Ten** – Find ten minutes everyday just for you. Do nothing. Breathe, reflect, STOP.
- **Priority List** - Check what’s on your list. Where are you? If you are not on your list, get yourself on there. If you are at the bottom of the list, look for ways to push yourself higher. Do something every week just for you.
- **Have a Purpose** – Re-visit your personal sense of purpose and your core values. Write them down. Remind yourself regularly about why you do what you do and how you make a difference in the lives of others.
- **Tame the Inner Voice** – Check in with your inner critic and what she is feeding you. Re-program her/him and remind her of the things you do well and what makes you special.
- **Be Attractive** – See the beauty and abundance in your life. You will attract more.
- **Grieve** – When you have experienced a significant loss, a patient or colleague, allow yourself the time and opportunity to experience the associated feelings. Write about it.
- **Seek Support** – Turn to a support group, a coach or a counsellor when you are feeling overwhelmed.
- **Be Creative** – Find a creative outlet for yourself and give yourself the gift of time to pursue it. Get lost in painting, gardening, photography or decoupage.

Reprinted with permission. Betty Healey is a speaker, coach, author, and former health care professional, specializing in Care for the Care-Giver. Her corporate consulting focuses on cultivating spirit and values in the workplace. For more information, please visit www.roadsigns.ca or email resources@creativebound.com.

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