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# COMPASSION FATIGUE WORKSHOP — SUPPORTING GOOD MENTAL HEALTH IN ANIMAL WELFARE PROFESSIONALS

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## DEFINITIONS AND KEY TERMS

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**Sympathy** means *you understand* what the other person or animal is feeling and you might *feel sorry for them*.

**Empathy** means *you actually feel* what the other person or animal is feeling.

**Compassion** is the *willingness to take action* to relieve that suffering.



# WHAT IS COMPASSION FATIGUE?

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Empathetic distress / Secondary trauma syndrome

Defined as a gradual reduction of compassion over time, because of direct or indirect exposure to trauma

Prevalent in jobs that deal with difficult and traumatic situations (animal rescue, nurses, firefighters etc)

*"The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet."*

Question: Is this the same as 'burnout'?





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# GROUP WORK



Based on what you've learned, how would you describe "compassion fatigue"?

Have you seen or experienced something like this in your work or personal life?

## **Workplace Challenges (5–7 Minutes)**

What are some of the most difficult parts of working with animals every day?

How do these challenges affect your energy, emotions, or relationships?

## **Sharing Experiences (5 Minutes)**

Can you share a time when work felt especially stressful or overwhelming?

How did you handle it at the time?

# GROUP WORK



## **Cultural Viewpoints (5 Minutes)**

How do people in your community or culture usually deal with stress or emotional fatigue?

Are there any cultural values or practices that help you manage these feelings, or make it harder to talk about them?

## **Current Coping Strategies (5–7 Minutes)**

What do you do to manage stress or feel better after a hard day at work?

Have you seen other people use strategies you'd like to try?

## **Recognizing Compassion Fatigue (5 Minutes)**

What are some signs that someone might be experiencing compassion fatigue?

How can you recognize these signs in yourself or others?

## **Supporting Each Other (5 Minutes)**

How can colleagues or your workplace provide support when someone is feeling burned out?

What does a supportive work environment look like to you?

# GROUP WORK

## Positive Moments (5 Minutes)

What helps you stay motivated and remember why you do this work?

How could you share or celebrate these positive moments with others?

## Practical Solutions (7 Minutes)

What small steps can you take to take care of yourself better at work?

What could your workplace do to help reduce stress or prevent burnout?

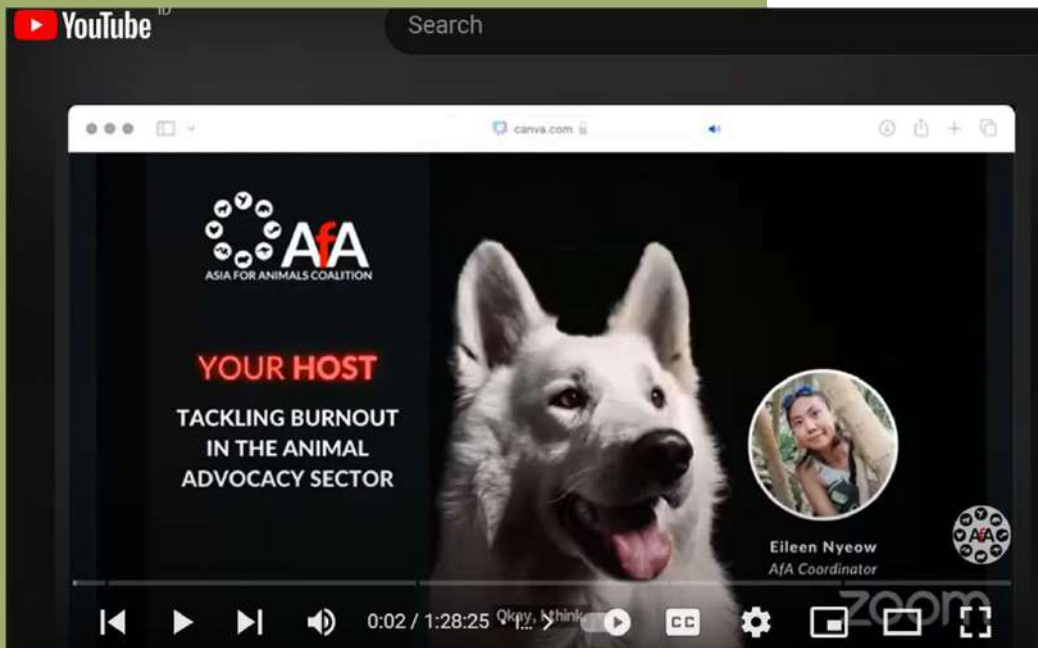
## Looking Forward (5 Minutes)

After this discussion, what is one new idea or insight you have about compassion fatigue?

What is one small change you'd like to focus on moving forward?



# RESOURCES ON COMPASSION FATIGUE



<https://www.asiaforanimals.com/cibasias>

<http://compassionfatigue.org/cfap-materials.html>

<https://sheltermedicine.vetmed.ufl.edu/education/continuing-education/compassion-fatigue-strategies/>

<https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/35881184>

<https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/running-low-on-empathy-how-to-heal-from-compassion-fatigue-1115197>

Meditation apps: Waking Up / Headspace / Calm





THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

FOUR PAWS is the global animal welfare organisation for animals under direct human influence, which reveals suffering, rescues animals in need and protects them. Founded in 1988 in Vienna by Heli Dungler and friends, the organisation advocates for a world where humans treat animals with respect, empathy and understanding. The sustainable campaigns and projects of FOUR PAWS focus on companion animals including stray dogs and cats, farm animals and wild animals – such as bears, big cats and orangutans – kept in inappropriate conditions as well as in disaster and conflict zones. With offices in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Kosovo, the Netherlands, Switzerland, South Africa, Thailand, Ukraine, the UK, the USA and Vietnam as well as sanctuaries for rescued animals in eleven countries, FOUR PAWS provides rapid help and long-term solutions.

[www.four-paws.org](http://www.four-paws.org)

# SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS



Anger  
Frustration  
Irritability  
Sadness  
Negativity  
Guilt / shame  
Feeling inadequate  
Reduced empathy  
Resentment  
Dark humour /  
sarcasm



Forgetfulness  
Feeling overwhelmed  
Numb to violence  
Poor decision making  
Reduced sex drive  
Abusing substances  
Poor work / life balance  
Poor relationships  
Seeing yourself as  
indispensable

# PERSONAL SOLUTIONS



Be honest with yourself – identify thoughts and feelings as they come up, **without judgement**

**Share** how you feel with someone you trust

**Be kind** to yourself (and others).

Do things that bring you joy!

Educate yourself – resources available after this presentation

# SUICIDE IN VETERINARY PROFESSIONALS



## Veterinary Wellness Bien-être vétérinaire

### Suicide in veterinary medicine: Let's talk about it

Debbie L. Stoewen

**S**uicide and non-fatal suicidal behavior are major public health problems across the world: approximately 1 million people worldwide die by suicide each year. In fact, the number of lives lost through suicide exceeds the number of deaths due to homicide and war combined. Beyond the tragedy of life lost, there is the devastating human cost to family, friends, and colleagues, a cost carried forward with lasting impacts and lifelong repercussions. Suicide is injurious, both deeply and widely.

Several studies have identified a link between suicide and occupation (1), including the healthcare professions and our own profession. The rate of suicide in the veterinary profession has been pegged as close to twice that of the dental profession, more than twice that of the medical profession (2), and 4 times the rate in the general population (3).

No matter where we live, what we do, and what our state

*Myth #1: Talking about suicide*

Talking about suicide does *not* way to identify the intention of someone is given the opportunity through with suicide diminish

*Myth #2: People who talk about seriously.*

Suicidal talk is a major warning *always* be taken seriously. This talk is just attention-seeking | invitation to help the person | especially after they've made | disclosed sensitive thoughts | never come. Without approp

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REVIEW ARTICLE  
Open Access

### Suicide in veterinary medicine: A literature review

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### Abstract

Veterinarians are commonly exposed to occupational stressors, including excessive workload and financial constraints. These stressors can lead to psychological distress, which typically results in mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and burnout and can even culminate in suicide attempts or suicide deaths. Risk factors associated with poor mental health and high rates of suicide in veterinary practitioners include continuous exposure to challenging scenarios, such as

<https://www.veterinaryworld.org/Vol.16/June-2023/12.pdf>

[https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4266064/pdf/cvj\\_01\\_89.pdf](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4266064/pdf/cvj_01_89.pdf)

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7764342/pdf/ijerph-17-091>

# RESOURCES AND SUPPORT



**Not One More Vet:**  
<https://www.nomv.org>

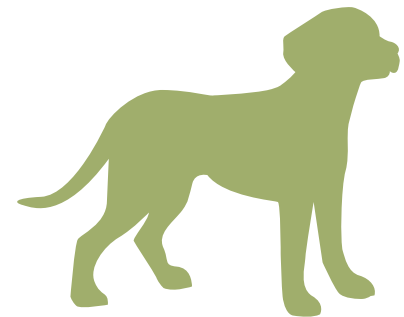
**Open Counselling:**  
<https://blog.opencounseling.com/hotlines-id/>

**Bisa Helpline:**  
<https://bisahelpline.org/>

# EMPLOYER SOLUTIONS



- Provide training and information about CF
- Reduce stress in the workplace (or at home)
- Have a support system for employees
- Respect privacy outside working hours
- Be open to feedback and listen to what employees have to say



YOU HAVE POWER OVER  
YOUR MIND – NOT OUTSIDE  
EVENTS. REALIZE THIS, AND  
YOU WILL FIND STRENGTH.

YOU ARE ENOUGH.  
YOU ARE LOVED.  
YOU MATTER.  
ALWAYS.

