Compassion Fatigue in Legal Nurse Consultants

Do you suffer from compassion fatigue? Just what is this? Dr. Charles Figley defines it as a state experienced by those helping people or animals in distress; it is an extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped to the degree that it can create a secondary traumatic stress for the helper.”

I’m Pat Iyer bringing you Iyer’s Insights, one of the twice weekly shows of Legal Nurse Podcast.

We’re not invincible. Nurses and legal nurse consultants are natural candidates for compassion fatigue. First, clinically active nurses

- work with the dying or seriously and chronically ill.
- must comfort patients’ family members.
- treat the victims of major accidents or wife-beating or child abuse.
- And Not only do we daily witness the results of disasters; we also see the results of human cruelty.

In addition, nurses may have to deal with short staffing, long work hours, the incivility of others at their workplace, and feeling invalidated or dismissed.

Any LNC who continues to work in a medical setting is equally vulnerable to these conditions.

In addition, LNCs suffer the stresses associated with launching a small business. There are marketing, finance and operation issues to address.

Even when the business is launched, in addition to the long-term challenge of making it flourish, LNCs may have to deal with impatient, frantic lawyers.
The analytical work we do means we delve into the details of injuries, pain, and losses. Some cases are more difficult to tackle than others. I had vivid dreams after immersing myself in the records of severely injured patients.

Thus, leaving the full-time world of nursing doesn’t guarantee exemption from compassion fatigue.

Not every nurse responds to stressful circumstances with compassion fatigue. Like everyone, we have different degrees of resiliency. However, you should be aware of the warning signs so you can recognize them in yourself or in colleagues.

**Early Signs of Compassion Fatigue**

- Boredom with work
- Detachment and distance from patients or clients
- Short tempers, irritability
- Feelings of failure and loss of pride
- Sleepless nights during which you replay disturbing events
- Seeking comfort food
- Weight gain

**Later Signs**

- Physical and mental exhaustion
- Dread of going to work
- Headaches, backaches
- Decrease in work efficiency and accuracy
- Feeling hostile to co-workers and family
- Constant tiredness, possible illness

Untreated compassion fatigue can also lead to forms of addiction.

**How can you reduce or prevent compassion fatigue?**

*Shift your focus to self-care and self-compassion.* Take the work breaks you need. A good rule of thumb is to do something for yourself at least once a day.
Be self-reflective. Learn to recognize the feelings you have when working on cases involving severe trauma.

Don’t push negative physical and emotional feelings down. Trace the roots of these feelings.

Notice when you start thinking critically about yourself. See what happens when you replace self-criticism with self-kindness.

Mindfulness can play a powerful role in stress reduction. Ask yourself what negative physical or mental feelings are trying to tell you. Understand your reactions to situations or circumstances.

Mind your diet. Look at what you are eating. I’ve covered diet in some of the Legal Nurse Podcast shows. Be sure to listen to 164, the Highly Addictive Nature of Sugar, 174, Count Your Chemicals and Not Your Calories, and 175, 5 Small Diet Changes You Can Make for A Big Impact on Your Health.

Ask for outside help if you need it. Nurses are so accustomed to helping others that they are reluctant to ask for help for themselves. Don’t hesitate. If you need extra prodding, remember this is for you, your family, and the clients you serve. They all need you. And you need a healthy and happy you.

Before we continue with the show, I want to share a source of great information about stress management. I talk to too many LNCs who work all the time, are exhausted, and afraid of getting burned out.

I need to ask you a few questions.

👉 Do you think of yourself as a strong, capable person?

👉 Do you think you are above average in your ability to handle a crisis?

👉 Do you think you can keep working through tension and stress?
So did Aila Accad. One day this masters-prepared nurse found herself curled up on her sofa with a blanket over her head, trying to escape her crisis. Has this ever happened to you too?

Aila learned how to reduce her tension, lose weight, make better choices and love herself with the techniques she will share in this program called **Instant Stress Busters**.

In this program you will discover how to instantly reduce your anxiety and think more clearly when tension rises. You can get the audio recording of this training and the transcript at the link in the show notes for podcast.legalnursebusiness.com or on our new mobile app, Biz.edu. You can download the app at legalnursebusiness.com/bizedu, and then use that to access our podcasts, blogs, videos, courses, free reports and other great content. The link to get the app is legalnursebusiness.com/bizedu.

Get Aila’s training today at the show notes for this podcast at podcast.legalnursebusiness.com or on the app’s show notes. Click on the “learn more” button. You’ll receive a 25% discount for the training when you use the code “Listened” in the coupon box for the shopping cart. Start today using new techniques to reduce anxiety and tension.

Let’s go back to the show.

The following describes too many businesspeople: You’re a solopreneur or you run a business with a few employees. Sometimes you’re struggling.
You never have enough hours in the day. You push yourself, drive yourself, and, ultimately, you don’t take care of yourself.

A few days ago, I met a former attorney who is now a writer and photographer. When I commented that I worked with personal injury and medical malpractice attorneys, she said, “Yeah, those are the guys who die early from coronaries.” We traded stories of attorneys who died at deposition or in the courtroom.

Do you really take care of yourself?

I’ve talked to LNCs who don’t take care of themselves.

- They take pride in how little sleep they get, how many meals they skip—or how much fast food they eat on the run.
- They don’t exercise.
- They sit way too long at their desks.
- They’re on their cell phones or computers until right before they finally stumble off to sleep and then wonder why they are sleepless.
- They think the many ways in which they sacrifice their health are necessary for the success of their businesses and for their personal success.
- Maybe they say hard work never killed anyone.

They’re wrong.

Would You Treat Your Car That Way?

On an elementary level, trying to be a successful LNC while practicing the above harmful habits is like driving a car with the safety brake on. You don’t get very far, and you’ll ruin the car.

To continue the analogy, too many people treat their bodies far worse than they would their cars. They might buy good gas and oil, but they think that a fast-food hamburger, fries, and carbonated beverage equals good fuel. In reality, it’s sludge, and someday their hearts will probably tell them that.

Brains Need Rest and Relaxation
Scientists and doctors say that the average human needs 8-9 hours of sleep a night for optimal health. That includes brain health. When you’re constantly exhausted, you start to make bad decisions. You think more slowly. You get irritated, and your interpersonal skills take a dive.

**Does this sound like the pathway to lasting success?**

You can’t afford to burn yourself out when you have a service business. Snapping at clients and employees or subcontractors leads to big trouble. I found if I came to work in a bad mood, I had to be very careful how I reacted to my staff.

It wasn’t their fault I was irritable. Working with clients who are under constant stress can lead to constant stress in your life – if you are not careful.

**Bodies Need to Move**

Your body is designed to move. Your muscles want to stretch. Physical exercise burns off nervous energy. The well-exercised body falls asleep more easily at night.

Sitting at a desk, especially in front of a computer, all day creates both mental and physical exhaustion. The savvy person gets up at least once an hour and walks around. He or she may devote part of lunch hour to walking.

**Lose weight**

Yes, I admit it. I’ve allowed extra pounds to settle in my belly. I did not like my silhouette.

I’ve been using an app called Noom since March and have lost 10 pounds. It is a mix of group support, weighing in, recording food intake, and education. I’ve learned a lot about the psychology of eating, hunger, portion control, green, yellow and red foods (in terms of desirability, not appearance) and how to say no to food that I should not eat.
Be honest. If you are carrying around a few extra pounds and not feeling good about how you look, start working on that. Check out Noom to see if you like the program. You get a free trial first. Using it changes the way you view food and encourages you to make healthy choices.

And take care of yourself. Life is short and you have only one shot through.

Here’s one last mention of **Instant Stress Busters**, the training that shares methods to handle your stress so that you can have a correct work life balance. You’ll be able to order this using the “learn more” button in the show notes for this podcast at podcast.legalnursebusiness.com. Or if you are listening to our podcast using our new mobile app, called biz.edu, you’ll see the show notes on your phone. Get our app at legalnursebusiness.com/bizedu.

We have all kinds of resources for you at legalnursebusiness.com. Build your skills, get new ideas for your business. Check out the webinars, teleseminars, courses and books at legalnursebusiness.com.

Would having an experienced LNC business coach help you achieve your goals faster? Explore coaching with Pat Iyer at LNCAcademy.com to get more clients, make more money and avoid expensive mistakes.

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