Stress Management, Burnout and Compassion Fatigue for the Veterinary Professional

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Stress and Stressors for the Veterinary Professional

Stress is a fact of life today, and it is a problem within the field of veterinary medicine that can cause mental and physical problems and disrupt this rewarding career. Stress can be defined as the state produced when the body responds to any demand for adaption or adjustment. Stress can be good and bad depending on the stressor associated with the stress. Stress can have both negative and positive effects on a person. There are three main stressors that we experience daily, they are: external, environmental, and internal and we can experience all of them or single one at any given time. Each stressor that we experience can act differently in each individual person. The stressor can energize a person to achieve challenges and achievements that normally the individual may shy away from, but on the other hand, the stressor can make the individual feel overwhelmed and exhausted. There are three factors that determined whether the stressor is negative or positive, they are: choice, control, and consequences. Therefore, each of the stressful situations provides an opportunity of choice, a feeling of control, and an anticipation of the consequences, which again these can be good or bad, depending on the situation. Since stress is unavoidable, complete understanding of these concepts can help an individual transform adverse stressor into tolerable stressors.

Physical and mental effects of the stress on the individual

Stress, whether good or bad, effects a person’s mental and physical functioning. A complete understanding of how and where stress originates within the body, its pathway throughout the body, and the mental and physical toll it can take on the individual, will help the individual manage his/her own stress and maintain good health. Fight or flight is one concept in daily life and understanding the importance will help you understand your reaction to the stressor plaguing you at the time. Humans are equipped with this concept to help them handle threatening situations, basically to either flee or fight when someone or something is threatening them, either externally or internally. The list of an individual’s internal stressors is unique to each individual, depending on the individual’s background, temperament, and aspirations and the stress response is nonspecific and is mobilized when one is faced with any of these threats, either being perceived or real.
Ways of dealing with stress, either good or bad, in which an individual within the veterinary field will do to deal with all of it.

There are many good and bad ways for dealing with stress in your life. Some good ways of dealing with stress is exercise, good nutrition, plenty of sleep. A negative way, which is too common in the veterinary professional, is the use of illegal or legal substances. Substance abuse and stress is a bad influence of dealing with different types of stress. Since the nervous system, brain, and emotions are dependent on the normal action of the neurotransmitters, some individuals suffering from stress may turn to drugs and alcohol almost as a form of self-medication. Obviously, the risk factors of substance abuse are great for the individual and this type of behavior is also a great risk to that the individual’s family, friends, and the patients that are being treated by that individual.

Identifying the stressors in the veterinary professional

A veterinary professional’s stressor load is unique to the veterinary world, which do include general, basic stressors in anyone world, but also those unique to the veterinary world. These include life event stressors, environmental stressors, personal stressors, client stressors, and career stressors. We will identify each stressor and have examples for each individual will be able to help identify their individual stressor and help the individual cope with those stressors in a positive way. There are many years, one important aspect is the use of support systems, such as friends, family, coworkers, etc.....

Burnout

Burnout is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by long term involvement in emotionally demanding situations. Veterinary medicine has a high burnout rate, especially among the veterinary technician and support staff. There are many physical symptoms of burnout, they include illnesses such as ulcers, gastroenteritis, cardiac issues, heartburn, etc..... Behavioral symptoms of burnout include withdrawal, overeating, increase in alcohol or drugs intake, constant fatigue, agitation, nervousness, anger or aggression, increase spending, etc.....

As we go through the lecture, we will discuss the four major stages of burnout that each individual goes through, they are: 1. Physical, Mental, and Emotional Exhaustion, 2. Shame and Doubt, 3. Cynicism and Callousness, 4. Failure, Helplessness, and Crisis. Along with the stages, we will discuss the signs and symptoms of burnout and how to help identify them to get the support needed before getting to the point of such burnout that the individual leaves the profession. Also, in this lecture, we will discuss the difference between stress and burnout for that individual will understand what stage of this common disease within our profession.
Compassion Fatigue

Compassion is defined as a deep awareness of the suffering of another, coupled with the wish to relieve it. Fatigue is defined as the mental weariness resulting from exertion that is associated with attending to the emotional and physical pain of others. Combined, compassion fatigue has been called the hurt of the heart something all of us in the veterinary profession are susceptible to, and many of us today suffer from this condition. Why us? Only compassionate, empathic, loving, and caring people suffer from compassion fatigue—the very people who are so vital to the animal-care field.