

# Constructing a Meaningful Narrative as OT Practitioner, Educator & Student: Self-care Tools for Sustaining a Career in Compassionate Caring

Emily A. Zeman, OTD, MS, OTR/L

## Learning Objectives

- 1 Identify nature of working & student roles, and how stress, burnout & compassion fatigue impact patient care & student learning experiences.
- 2 Evaluate evidence-based practices & strategies to support work sustainability & professional quality of life as a helping professional.
- 3 Discuss implications for occupational therapy practice, education & fieldwork.
- 4 Create a tool-box from science-driven resources for constructing an evolving, meaningful, & compassionate-filled career.

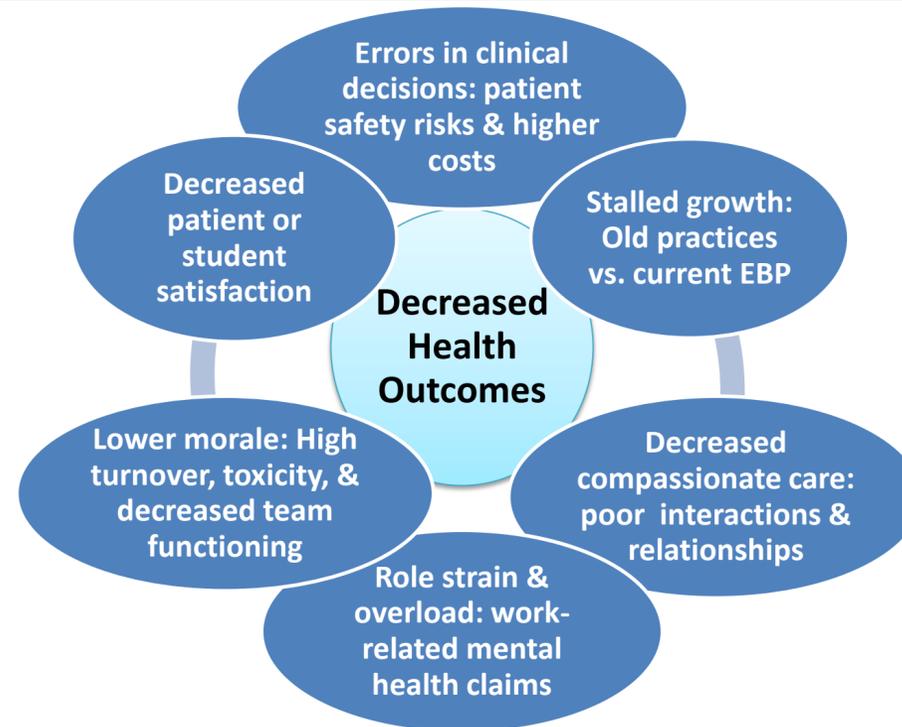
## Background

### Practitioner, Educator, or Student Roles

- Consistent, compassionate care for clients/patients or students
- Paperwork, productivity demands, & academic studying reduce time as a resource
- Organizational structure & goals may appear misaligned with values and best practices
- Client & family relationships & stories of suffering = decreased boundaries & energy
- High caseload numbers or academic workload
- High # of Fieldwork students / advisees
- Increased chances for litigation = threats to security
- Financial strain and lower reward for work
- Personal strain in roles & routines at home & in community<sup>1-3</sup>



## Impact on Patient Care & Student Education<sup>1-4, 6</sup>



## Discussion

There are many ways to practice self-care in one's professional & personal roles: they change, according to developmental state & changing needs.<sup>6</sup> Questions to ask:

- ❖ What is the ideal balance for me in work & leisure?
- ❖ How do I prepare for change, imminent in clinical work?
- ❖ How do I build my energy and resilience reserves when away from work or school?
- ❖ What do I already do in terms of self-care? What have I found beneficial?
- ❖ In what ways do I ensure my goals are high & challenging vs. unrealistic & deflating?
- ❖ Given the challenges of the educational & health care systems, in what ways have I been creative in ensuring I unfold the wonders & privileges of being a clinician into my work? How can my patients' stories become part of my narrative?<sup>6</sup>

## Conclusions

- 1 Recognize Toxicity
- 2 Replenish the Self
- 3 Reconstruct your Story

## References

1. Barton, R. Corban, A. Herrli-Warner, L. McClain, E. Riehle, D. & Tinner, E. (2013). Role strain in occupational therapy fieldwork educators. *Work*, 44(317-328).
2. Bush, N.J. (2009). Compassion fatigue: Are you at risk? *Oncology Nursing Forum*, 36(1), 24-28. doi: 10.1188/09.ONF.24-28
3. Lawson, G. & Myers, J.E. (2011). Wellness, professional quality of life, and career-sustaining behaviors: What keeps us well? *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 89(2), 163-171.
4. Reid, D. (2009). Capturing presence moments: The art of mindful practice in occupational therapy. *The Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 76(3), 180-188.
5. Schwerman, N., & Stellmacher, J. (2012). A holistic approach to supporting staff in a pediatric hospital setting. *Workplace and Safety*, 60(9), 385-390.
6. Wicks, R.J. (2008). *The Resilient Clinician*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

## Career Sustaining Behaviors<sup>3</sup> & Evidence-based Self-care Practices

### Personal

### Self-awareness & Presence

- Spending time with family/partner & friends
- Mindfulness activities such as yoga, meditation, prayer, & spiritual reflection
- Incorporate leisure & vacation activities
- Exercise & movement in different settings such as nature or away from work
- Participate in support groups & engage in affirmations for values clarification
- Enhance sense of humor<sup>4-6</sup>

### Work-related

### Professional Enrichment & Resilience

- Maintain professional identity- attend conferences & cultivate mentorship
- Stay current in literature & develop questions
- Seek case consultation & dialogue with peers
- Remain objective about clients & curious about their stories
- Eat lunch with colleagues or walk outside for breaks during the day
- Diversify work load & responsibilities in all roles: student, therapist, academic
- Set good boundaries with clients & employers<sup>3, 5-6</sup>