



# Meeting the Challenge- Compassion Fatigue and Management Responsibility

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# My Backstory and Disclaimer

- I am not a psychologist
- I am presenting my professional assessment
- My opinions are my own
- I encourage spirited debate as this topic gains momentum



# Career Paths in LAS-

## Typical Training

- Entry level (cagewash/husbandry)
  - Basic training, non technical
- Undergrad (science discipline)
  - Understands scientific method, anatomy/physiology (comparatively)
- BS graduate/post grad student
  - Core skill set, targeted study (disease area)
- Doctorate (PhD, DVM, etc)
  - Research vs Care, Research Vet vs Private Practice



# Training Programs

- Different depending on the background
- Similar in one common denominator
  - Most programs lack DIRECT training in identifying emotional distress/compassion fatigue
    - Training of staff
    - Training of LEADERSHIP



# Common Training Curricula:

- Cagewash/Husbandry
  - Sanitation, handling/restraint, daily obs, **euthanizing**
- Animal Tech
  - Dosing/sample collection/data collection/**euthanizing**
- Research Associate
  - Benchwork, data analysis
- Researcher
  - Technical writing (protocols, study reports), Statistical Analysis...
- Veterinarian
  - ?
  - Formal training at institution?
  - Continuing education (ACLAM, ASLAP, etc)



# Other Training

Note: not intended to be an exhaustive list

- Teamwork
- Conflict Resolution
- IACUC Training:
  - 3 Rs
  - Alternatives search
  - Animal model selection
- Management training
  - Emotional Intelligence
  - MBTI (and similar)
  - LEAN (and similar)

# A Critical Skill Not <typically> addressed

- Respect and empathy for the animal heroes and those that work with them
  - Anecdote: I presented on this ~ 15 years ago at QUAD Symposium...the animal caretaker and animal heroes
  - 15 years. 15 years and we're still just scratching the surface...



By Irina Gelbukh - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0,  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=27166481>



## Some examples

- Entry level husbandry tech rushing through task of euthanizing 20 cages of mice
- Animal tech delivering anesthetized dogs to necropsy at the end of a 6 month study
- Research associate writing "sac" on a group of rat cages after data suggests compound not working as planned
- Clinical vet interacting with study director requesting protocol edit for provision of broader coverage analgesia post surgery





## Examples-potential outcomes

- Husbandry tech fails to verify euthanasia through secondary method
  - IACUC investigation results in either recommendation for termination or retraining of the technical skill
- Husbandry tech completes task successfully, heads to lunch, calls home and has an argument with partner
- Animal tech delivers dogs to necropsy-necropsy tech snaps at animal tech for being late
- Animal tech calls in sick to work the day after study ends
- Research associate late turning in study report to manager
- Clinical vet argues w/study director, threatening to report SD to the IACUC (vet is typically a soft spoken person, not known to be argumentative)
- Study Director acquiesces to the clinical vet request, closes door at end of meeting (an unusual thing for this individual)



## The Bottom Line...

- Each of these are examples of POTENTIAL compassion fatigue
- They might also be examples of other things (poor technical ability <or poor training>, poor interpersonal skills, maybe the tox tech got food poisoning that night..)
- The fact is, we don't know what we don't know...



## ...bottom line cont'd

- Because we are not trained (as leaders) nor do we train (teams) or provide tools to support the potential toll compassion fatigue may have
- Management response is typically to look at conflict resolution methods
  - Instead, consider the potential root cause
  - Look for patterns of behavior (managers do this for performance issues why not here?)



## Longer Term Solutions

**Note:** these should be ONGOING programs

- Provide people managers with training/tools to identify possible compassion fatigue (again, we are managers, not psychologists)
  - No different than identifying other performance challenges-do not stigmatize this
  - Partner with HR to incorporate compassion fatigue in EAP (Employee Assistance Program) packages (and include in literature)
- Include training in self recognizing compassion fatigue symptoms for all who work w/animals in research
  - ALL...that's entry level through PhD/veterinarians
- Consider initiating a program that provides recognition to the animals used at institutions
  - Culturally, some facilities outside of the US do this annually
  - Some facilities within the US do this now



## Utilize existing resources

### An Additional “R”: Remembering the Animals

Susan A. Iliff

*ILAR Journal*, Volume 43, Issue 1, 2002, Pages 38–47, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ilar.43.1.38>

#### Published:

01 January 2002

#### AALAS Resources:

<https://www.aalas.org/education/educational-resources/cost-of-caring>

Brochure: Cost of Caring  
Presentation

# For more information.....

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1. Compassion Fatigue: The Cost of Caring brochure is a newsletter-size handout to assist all members of the research team in understanding this common concern with suggestions and resources for managing human emotions in caring for laboratory animals. Download at <https://www.aalas.org/education/educational-resources/cost-of-caring>
2. American Association for Laboratory Animal Science. Webinar Recording: Compassion Fatigue and Compassion Satisfaction in the Workplace. Available at: <https://www.aalas.org/store/detail?productId=6407095>
3. Compassion Fatigue course on the AALAS Learning Library. Available at [www.aalaslearninglibrary.org](http://www.aalaslearninglibrary.org).
4. AVMA Wellness and Peer Assistance. Available at: <https://www.avma.org/ProfessionalDevelopment/Personal/PeerAndWellness/Page/default.aspx>
5. Self-Assessment – ProQOL. A website with resources on compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue and professional quality of life. Available at: [http://www.proqol.org/Compassion\\_Fatigue.html](http://www.proqol.org/Compassion_Fatigue.html) and [http://www.proqol.org/ProQol\\_Test.html](http://www.proqol.org/ProQol_Test.html)





## Final Thoughts...in pictures



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Photo Credit: Wisconsin National Primate Research Center via CSOW

