

The Effect of a Compassion Fatigue Awareness and Self-Care Skills Educational Program on Retention Among Certified Nursing Assistants Working in a Veterans Nursing Home

Michele Dreher, MN, RN, FNP-BC

Abstract

Background: Compassion fatigue is the emotional and physical exhaustion that can affect helping professionals and caregivers over time. Certified nursing assistants (CNAs) are at high risk for compassion fatigue due to their daily exposure to veterans who are suffering from a myriad of chronic medical and behavioral illnesses along with repeated workplace stressors. If not addressed early, compassion fatigue can adversely impact a CNA's wellbeing and quality of resident care. Compassion fatigue is associated with high absenteeism, high turnover, and low retention rates. Despite these challenges, there is no published research on the effects of a workplace compassion fatigue awareness and self-care skills educational program for CNAs caring for veterans in a state-run veterans nursing home.

Purpose: The purpose of this evidence-based quality improvement project was to explore the outcomes of a 90-minute workplace educational program addressing compassion fatigue awareness and the use of self-care skills among CNAs working in a 90-bed state-run veterans nursing home.

Method: A quasi-experimental design was utilized. A seven-question demographic survey and Professional Quality of Life Scale (Pro QOL-version 5) tool was used to measure CNAs' level of compassion satisfaction, burnout and secondary traumatic stress at three intervals: pre-intervention, one-month post intervention, and three-months post-intervention.

Results: Forty-five CNAs participated in the intervention. One-month post-intervention scores indicated the 90-minute intervention was successful in increasing compassion satisfaction,

decreasing burnout, and secondary traumatic stress known as compassion fatigue. Three-month post-intervention scores revealed the intervention was successful in sustaining low burnout and compassion fatigue scores. Retention increased among state-employed CNAs and the use of supplemental agency staff decreased within the facility.

Conclusions: By bringing awareness to compassion fatigue and self-care skill strategies in the workplace, CNAs can develop physical and mental resilience to workplace stressors that can ultimately lead to an increase in CNA retention, quality care delivery, and improved resident outcomes.

Implications: It is imperative that CNAs are aware of compassion fatigue and self-care skill strategies. If not addressed in the early phases, compassion fatigue can have severe consequences on the quality of care provided to our nation's veterans and on the financial health of long-term care organizations.