

## Care for the Supervisor

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## Conflict of Interest

Neither Lauri nor Julia have anything to disclose.

## Learning Objectives

- Identify factors that increase the likelihood of developing burnout and/or compassion fatigue
- Explore the experience of supervising students for both new and experienced genetic counselors
- Examine the concept that we are "gatekeepers" of the profession
- Review Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction and other tools
- Summarize self-care strategies
- Model self-care strategies for students

## Burnout & Compassion Fatigue

- Burnout:
  - Emotional exhaustion and losing enthusiasm for work (emotional exhaustion)
  - Depersonalization or treating people as if they were objects
  - Low sense of personal accomplishment
- Compassion fatigue:
  - "The cost of caring"
  - Feeling overwhelmed by constantly experiencing patients' suffering
  - A state of detachment experienced when providers repeatedly engage with patients who are in distress

Geller et al., *Clinical Genetics*, 2010; Kearney et al., *JAMA*, 2009

## Potential Sources of Stress for Supervisors

## Challenges for supervisors based on years of experience

New supervisors	Experienced supervisors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do I gain a student's trust or respect when I am new in the field?</li> <li>• How do I manage taking on new roles when I am still finding my place as a GC?</li> <li>• Will I be able to provide enough perspective for the student?</li> <li>• Will the student trust me and be open with reflection on cases?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can I recall how it felt to be a student?</li> <li>• How will I balance various other clinic duties with student supervision?</li> <li>• How will I engender trust for the patient to rely on the student as the primary provider?</li> </ul>

### Gatekeeping for the profession

- How do we ensure that interns who need extra guidance/ structure are ready to be independent genetic counseling professionals?
- We are responsible for student in the context of:
  - The training program
  - The profession
  - The patient population

### HELPING professionals

- Naturally, GCs have a desire to help and to serve
- BUT if not well balanced, it can lead to distress and burnout
- What strategies can help so we do not put ourselves at risk for burnout by taking on supervisor roles?
- NSGC Code of Ethics (section I): Genetic Counselors must **“Be responsible for their own physical and emotional health as it impacts their professional judgment and performance, including seeking professional support, as needed.” (NSGC 2017)**

### And now that we’ve stressed you out...

Tools for stress reduction



### Mindfulness

- **“Conscious moment to moment awareness, cultivated by systematically paying attention, on purpose.”**
- **“A state in which one is highly aware and focused on the reality of the present moment, accepting and acknowledging it, without getting caught up in the thoughts that are about the situation or emotional reactions to the situation.”**



Cohen Katz et al., J of Holistic Nursing Practice, 2004  
Kabat-Zinn, New York: Hyperion, 1994

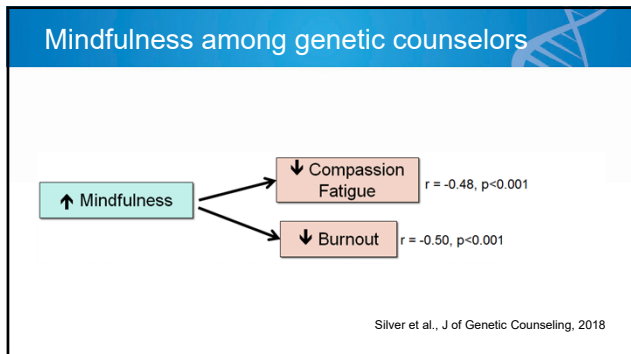
### Mindfulness Assessment

- Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale
- 15-item questionnaire that assesses an individual’s ability to be openly attentive to, and aware of, present events and experiences by focusing on both internal states and overt behaviors

### The Survey

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	almost	very	somewhat	somewhat	very	almost never
	always	frequently	frequently	infrequently	infrequently	
___ 1.	I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until some time later.					
___ 2.	I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else.					
___ 3.	I find it difficult to stay focused on what’s happening in the present.					
___ 4.	I tend to walk quickly to get where I’m going without paying attention to what I experience along the way.					
___ 5.	I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension or discomfort until they really grab my attention.					
___ 6.	I forget a person’s name almost as soon as I’ve been told it for the first time.					
___ 7.	It seems I am “running on automatic,” without much awareness of what I’m doing.					
___ 8.	I finish the rough activities without being really attentive to them.					
___ 9.	I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I’m doing right now to get there.					
___ 10.	I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I’m doing.					
___ 11.	I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time.					
___ 12.	I drive places on “automatic pilot” and then wonder why I went there.					
___ 13.	I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past.					
___ 14.	I find myself doing things without paying attention.					
___ 15.	I snack without being aware that I’m eating.					

Scoring: To score the scale, simply compute a mean (average) of the 15 items.



### MBSR training

- Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn
- Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR)
  - Defined protocol and curriculum: 8-week course that meets weekly for 2.5 hours and for a single all-day training & daily homework/meditation practice
  - Participants are trained on a range of formal meditation practices including mindfulness of the breath, body, movement, and thoughts
- Among healthcare providers, MBSR has led to improvements in burnout, stress, anxiety, empathy, and depression
- Offered at many hospitals and community meditation centers around the nation

Kabat-Zinn 1994; Lamothe et al. 2015; Santorelli et al. 2017; Stahl and Goldstein 2010

### Simple mindfulness techniques at work

- Quiet, non-rushed eating with attention on the meal as opposed to socializing or simultaneously working
- Break for breathing exercise or sitting meditation
- Walking meditation (walking with awareness of the experience, free from a destination or rushing)
  - Example: walking a labyrinth, but can be done anywhere, even in hospital corridors
- Mindful stretching break or chair yoga at your desk
- Sitting body scan

### Implementing self-care techniques at work

- Does your work environment promote self care?
- Do not work extra hours at the expense of:
  - Before/after work self care routines
  - A mid day break to eat and/or rest eyes/mind/heart
- Take a 5 minute mindfulness break (focused breath work, meditation, etc.)
- Process with colleagues and coordinators at GCTP

### Mindful Breathing

- Breathing exercises (1 to 10 minutes, the more you practice the more effective and efficient the exercise becomes)
- Slow, full four to six count inhalation and exhalation (balanced breath)
- Longer exhalation to help ground and relax
- Longer inhalation to uplift and rejuvenate

And now, let's breathe together...

### Re-evaluating potential Sources of Stress for Supervisors

## Reframing Challenges & Recognizing Strengths

New supervisors	Experienced supervisors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I can empathize with the student's concerns</li> <li>I can use recent experience with supervisors to inform how I want to supervise</li> <li>I can share experience about transitioning into a practicing GC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I can act as a "safety net" or support as student grows their skills and expands beyond their comfort level</li> <li>I am less likely to be dealing with my own performance anxiety at this point in my career</li> <li>I get to benefit from the student's fresh perspective/ "beginner's mind"</li> </ul>

## Support in the "gatekeeping" role

- When a student needs more time and support in training, how do we help without creating more stress for ourselves or taking on guilt about their progress?
  - Helping the student know their opportunities for growth in the next rotation benefits both the student and training program
  - Shedding light on the need for additional time in training fulfills our obligation to patients
- Stronger communication with the GCTP is needed to support the supervisor, especially if less experienced supervisors internalize the performance concerns of their students
- The more support the student needs for training, the more self-care a supervisor needs!**

## Consider the Mutually Beneficial Relationship

- When the supervisor needs dedicated time to manage their tasks, the student can be simultaneously working on helpful clinic related projects that require minimal to no supervision
  - Research for and writing abstracts for presentation
  - Updating wording for clinic protocols and patient materials
  - Creating an in service on a genetics topic for clinic staff
- The student gets experience with such duties and perhaps authorship, and the supervisor gets more done!

## Modeling self-care for interns

- In taking care of your own mental health, you are modeling good mental health for future generations of genetic counselors
- Engage in an honest, compassionate dialogue to set expectations at the beginning of the rotation to ensure:
  - A safe environment to share feelings of being overwhelmed and need to reassess responsibilities in the rotation
  - Use of strategies to reduce risk of burnout (break for lunch, take a walking meeting, take a break from interacting and work side by side, etc.)
- There will be times when good self-care routines wane, when you notice this simply re-prioritize your self-care without judgment or negativity
- Is it more comfortable to do self-care techniques alone or with the student? Perhaps some contracting with the student is needed?

## Self-Care and Mindfulness Resources

- Online MBSR Training (<https://mbsrtraining.com>) or classes
- Apps
  - Insight Timer
  - Headspace
  - Calm
  - Simple Habit
- Books
  - Full Catastrophe Living, Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD
  - The Mindful Brain, Daniel Siegel, MD
  - The Relaxation Response, Herbert Benson, MD
  - A New Earth, Eckhart Tolle
- Local resources such as community meditation centers, retreat centers, yoga classes, etc.

THERE ARE MANY OPTIONS! IF YOU FIND THAT SOMETHING DOESN'T RESONATE FOR YOU, EXPLORE A DIFFERENT OPTION.

## Continued Mindfulness Research in Genetic Counseling

- "A blinded randomized controlled trial of mindfulness meditation to improve genetic counselor and genetic counseling student professional well-being, retention in clinical roles, and counseling effectiveness."
  - Study design: implementing the use of Headspace among genetic counselor students and genetic counselors to study a variety of outcomes
- Could support the implementation of mindfulness training in training programs and workplaces



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