

**Compassion Fatigue  
and the Veterinary Team**  
– prevention is better than cure

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**Stress and related conditions are  
a real threat to veterinarians**

- **New Zealand study 2006**  
1907 veterinarians polled. Data from 849 (44.5%) veterinarians extracted:  
**Women experienced more work-related stress and depression than men,** veterinarians in small animal/mixed practice reported more stress and depression than those in other types of work,  
**and younger veterinarians experienced higher levels of stress than older veterinarians.**  
The main sources of stress were hours worked, client expectations, and unexpected outcomes.

**However...**

The assumption that veterinarians are more at risk for suicide than other professions, or that any suicides are due to being in the profession is controversial, but there is an increased focus on the challenges facing members of the profession.

In a March 2010 article in *Risk Management Monitor*, Dr David Bartram offered these possible explanations:

- Those admitted to veterinary school have **high-achieving personality types**, traits of which may include **neurosis, conscientiousness and perfectionism.**
- **Stress begins during training** and continues in practice, with a work environment marked by **long hours, high psychological demands, potentially low support** from managers and **high expectations by clients.**
- Solo practitioners **may be professionally and socially isolated.**
- Practitioners have **ready access to lethal drugs** and know how to use them.
- Veterinarians **philosophically accept euthanasia** as a way to alleviating suffering.

Maybe it's not the nature of the profession itself but the veterinarian's emotional make-up that results in increased stress and resultant negative outcomes?

What of the idea that something in the psychological makeup of veterinarians predisposes them to suicide?

Along with Dr D. Bartram, Dr M. Gaspar and psychologist C. Lotta consider that a valid supposition.

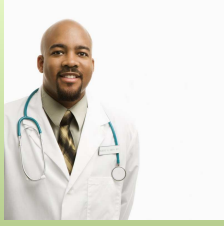
**Gaspar:**

- "Vets tend to be **perfectionists**"
- "There is an **introversion in the profession** that is often masked by extroversion.
- We have **a lot of workaholics** who **don't have strong support systems**, and those people are particularly at risk."
- "What we need to pay attention to is that a lot of us in helping professions **soldier on.**
- We hide things that are bothering us; **we don't readily disclose.**
- A lot of suicides look like there was no indication until you look more closely."

**Lotta:**

- Health-care providers in general tend to be **driven perfectionists** who are **fearful of incompetence.**
- They're **self-sacrificing, define themselves by their accomplishments** and have an **exaggerated sense of responsibility.**

In her presentation to first-year veterinary students, she says: "In ... **some ways, the very traits that will make you dedicated veterinarians – including your passion and compassion – can also make you more vulnerable.**"



## Compassion Satisfaction and Compassion Fatigue

As defined by the Professional Quality of Life organisation

For more information see [www.proqol.org](http://www.proqol.org)

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## What exactly are we talking about?

- **Compassion Satisfaction**
  - Positive aspects of working as a helper
  - Gives you a sense of purpose and that you add value
- **Compassion Fatigue**
  - Negative aspects of working as a helper
  - Can be as result of either or a combination of:
    - **Burnout**
    - Exhaustion, dissatisfaction, feeling ineffective, hopeless and overwhelmed
    - **Work-related traumatic stress**
    - Primary traumatic stress as a result of being the direct target of event
    - Secondary traumatic stress due to exposure to an event as a result of a relationship with the primary person

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## Professional Quality of Life

### Compassion Satisfaction

- The positive aspects of helping
- "The good stuff"

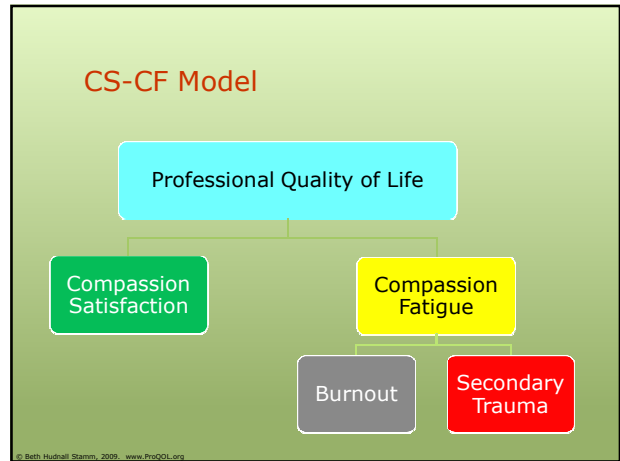


### Compassion Fatigue

- The negative aspects of helping
- "The bad stuff"



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## Compassion Satisfaction

- **The positive aspects of helping**
  - Pleasure and satisfaction derived from working in a well run veterinary practice
  - Making a positive difference to the lives of clients and patients
- **May be related to**
  - Providing care to others
  - To the system/environment in which one works
  - Working with colleagues
  - Positive beliefs about one's self
  - Altruism



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## Compassion Fatigue


- **The negative aspects of helping**
  - Losing a patient
  - Unexpected outcome to treatments
  - Dealing with difficult/resentful/overly emotional clients
- **The negative aspects of working in a veterinary practice may be related to**
  - Providing emotional care to clients and patients with little or no reciprocity
  - Inadequate resources
  - Working with difficult/unsupportive colleagues
  - Negative beliefs about self
- **Divided into Burnout and Secondary Traumatic Stress**

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## Burnout and Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS): Co-travelers

- **Burnout**
  - Work-related: due to high work-load or non-supportive environment
  - Sense of unhappiness, hopelessness and feelings of inefficacy
  - Reduced commitment to one's work
  - Exhaustion, increased errors, increased bouts of illness
  - Frustration, anger, lowered patience and empathy (feeling 'out of touch')
  - Depression
  - Gradual onset

Why yes, these are purely suggestions based on my 8+ years of school and \$300,000 worth of loans. Please feel free to do whatever your breeder suggests.




somecards  
use cards

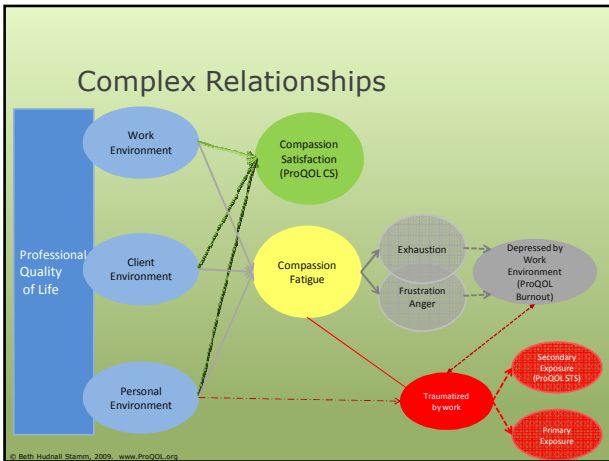
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## Burnout and Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS): Co-travelers

- **STS**
  - Work-related: due to secondary exposure to traumatically stressful events
  - Sleep disturbances, re-living events over and over, feeling overwhelmed
  - Avoiding exposure to similar events out of fear
  - Inability of separating private life from the work as a veterinarian
  - Feeling trapped, on edge, exhausted
  - Rapid onset, often linking to a specific event
- **Both share negative effects**
  - Burnout is about being worn out
  - STS is about being afraid



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### A tool for measuring individual levels of CS and CF:

*The Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL)*

- The ProQOL is free to use (may not be sold)
- It is a 30 item self assessment measure of the positive and negative effects of caring on the individual
- The ProQOL measures **Compassion Satisfaction** and **Compassion Fatigue**, as the former has a moderating effect on the latter and its two subscales:
  - Burnout
  - Secondary Trauma

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## To assess your personal levels of Compassion Satisfaction and Compassion Fatigue, you are invited to complete a personal ProQOL test

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### The methodology used by ProQOL is well researched and established

- The ProQOL is the most widely used measure of the positive and negative aspects of helping in the world
  - over 200 published research papers
- The ProQOL has proven to be a valid measure of compassion satisfaction and fatigue
  - utilised widely in research studies involving CS, CF, STS and vicarious traumatization
- It has been used for over 15 years by professional counselors and researchers
- The measure was developed with data from over 3000 people

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## Benefits of ProQOL

- The ProQOL is freely available to be downloaded from [www.proqol.org](http://www.proqol.org)
- It is easy to use
- It can be taken individually, in writing, online or at an individual computer
- It's easy to score
- Can be used repeatedly over periods of time, allowing users to monitor themselves

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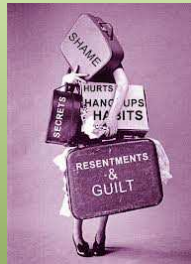
## Important caveats for using ProQOL

- Not a "psychological test" – it does not diagnose depression or PTSD
- Not a "medical test" – individuals cannot deduce that someone has a problem or a disorder based on this test
- Can be viewed as a screening for stress-related health problems and form a basis for seeking professional help
- Assists in understanding the positive and negative aspects of helping
- It is a highly personal test and individuals should not be forced to disclose their results
- If practice management wish to incorporate ProQOL in assisting their staff, maintaining confidentiality and sensitivity are essential

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## People bring themselves into every situation, often together with their past

- Their paradigms and beliefs
- Their stigma beliefs
- Their social support systems
  - Positive support
  - Negative support
- Their history of trauma and illness
- The history and influence of families and close others
- Their economic situation
- Their degree of EQ mastery
- Their resilience



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## Interpreting ProQOL Scores

- Scores on individual scales tell us about a person's responses on each of the constructs
- Viewing the combination of scores helps us "paint a picture" of what the person is telling us. E.g:
  - ↑ CS + ↓ BO & CF = most ideal outcome
  - ↑ BO + ↓ CS & STS = at risk individuals, should take time off
  - ↑ STS + ↓ CS & BO = probably benefit from trauma counseling and dealing with the fear aspect
- Can be used to track an individual's CS and CF over time

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## How can ProQOL be utilised in the veterinary environment?

- **Individual and personal resiliency planning**
  - The ProQOL can help you plan where to put your energy to increase your resilience
- **Organizational planning**
  - Can help veterinary management find ways to maximize the positive aspects and reduce the negative aspects of helping and working in a veterinary practice/environment
- **Supportive Supervision**
  - The ProQOL can be used as information for discussions between management and individuals, to assist staff in taking preventative action, encourage staff to consider professional help if necessary, or determine possible reasons for decreased work performance

For More Information: [www.proqol.org](http://www.proqol.org)

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