



Put your
oxygen mask
on first

content

“ Nothing
can wear you
out like caring
for people.

- S.E. Hinton

That Was Then, This is Now

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why are we especially susceptible?

For the most part, those in the veterinary field enjoy a high level of compassion satisfaction. However, like other caregiving professionals, veterinarians and others in veterinary practices deal with death and illness, as well as ethical dilemmas, on a near-daily basis, which takes a toll.

what is compassion fatigue?

When you feel a high level of satisfaction and joy in caring for others, it is called compassion satisfaction. On the other end of the spectrum is compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue occurs when you are repeatedly exposed to traumatic events, such as abuse, illness, or euthanasia.

Compassion
Fatigue

Compassion
Satisfaction

The veterinary field and other animal professions naturally attract people with a high level of compassion, empathy, and caring. It is possible to be overly empathetic to the point you feel that you are taking on the burden of the ill or dying patient. When you do this day in and day out, you begin to feel compassion fatigue.

we:

- Deliver bad news
- Deal with death and illness daily
- Are bullied or harassed by clients and the public
- Fight client ignorance
- Face ethical dilemmas
- Deal with animal cruelty
- Watch clients struggle to balance their pets needs with financial limits

burnout, depression, or compassion fatigue?

what's the difference?

burnout

Burnout is a result of stress in the work environment, such as problems with coworkers, loss of economic security, or diminished control. Symptoms of burnout include feeling emotionally exhausted, tired, and overloaded.

depression

Burnout and compassion fatigue have many similarities to depression, and they can even lead to depression. However, they are not the same thing. Depression is caused by a combination of biological, psychological, and social sources of distress.

compassion fatigue

Compassion fatigue is an emotional and physical burden created by the trauma of helping others in distress. Other names for compassion fatigue are secondary traumatic stress, vicarious trauma, and secondary victimization.



compassion fatigue vs burnout vs depression

When you are affected, it can be difficult to differentiate whether you have compassion fatigue, burnout, or depression. Not only is there a great deal of overlap in the symptoms of these three conditions, these conditions can afflict concurrently.

On the next page, you will find a charted list of symptoms commonly associated with each of these conditions. The chart is designed to offer an opportunity for self-assessment based solely on your perception of symptoms and symptoms often noted with these conditions. Keep in mind that this is not for diagnostic purposes; rather, it is to assess whether you have symptoms consistent with one or more of these conditions. A healthcare professional can help you with a diagnosis and treatment plan.

to use as a self-assessment

1. Fold the right side of the page inward to the center to cover the chart.
2. With a pencil, check the box next to each symptom you experience.
3. Open the right side to compare your answers to the symptoms commonly associated with the three conditions.
4. Repeat the process periodically for ongoing self-assessment.

| check all that apply to you | symptoms | symptoms of compassion fatigue | symptoms of burnout | symptoms of depression |
|-----------------------------|--|--------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| | Depressed mood | X | X | X |
| | Anxiety as a concurrent condition | | X | X |
| | Fatigue/lack of energy | X | X | X |
| | Chronic physical ailments | X | X | X |
| | Apathy/disinterest in activities | X | X | X |
| | Frustration | | X | |
| | Irritability | X | X | X |
| | Feeling overwhelmed | X | | |
| | Lack of motivation | | X | X |
| | Lack of creativity | | X | |
| | Lack of productivity | | X | X |
| | Sense of ineffectiveness | | X | |
| | Disrupted sleep patterns | | X | X |
| | Recurring nightmares or flashbacks | X | | |
| | Change in appetite | | X | X |
| | Lack of self-care/hygiene | X | | X |
| | Feelings of worthlessness | X | | X |
| | Hopelessness | X | X | X |
| | Excessive guilt | X | X | X |
| | Pessimism | | X | X |
| | Excess blaming/complaining | X | | |
| | Angry outbursts | X | X | |
| | Excessive negative thoughts about your job/coworkers | X | X | |
| | Excessive negative thoughts in general | | | X |
| | Denial about problems at work | X | | |
| | Frequently calling out of work | X | X | |
| | Difficulty concentrating at work | X | X | |
| | Difficulty concentrating in general | | | X |
| | Isolation from coworkers | X | | |
| | Isolation from everyone | | | X |
| | Feeling disillusioned about your job | X | X | |
| | Forgetfulness | | X | X |
| | Reduced ability to sympathize/empathize | X | | |
| | Compulsive behaviors | X | | |
| | Substance abuse as a concurrent condition | X | X | X |
| | Recurring thoughts of suicide/death | | | X |

Fold this page inward to cover the chart on this page.

self-assessment

This self-assessment tool was researched and designed by Beth Hudnall Stamm, PhD, and is reprinted here with permission. Take this self-assessment to determine where you fall on the compassion fatigue-satisfaction spectrum, the burnout scale, and the secondary traumatic stress scale.

When you care for pets and people, you have direct contact with their lives. As you may have found, your compassion for those you help can affect you in positive and negative ways. Below are some questions about your experiences, both positive and negative, as a care provider. Consider each of the following questions about you and your current work situation. Select the number that honestly reflects how frequently you experienced these things in the last 30 days. Consider marking your answers in different colors over time to monitor changes.

1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Very Often

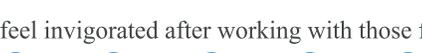
- 1 I am happy.

- 2 I am preoccupied with more than one patient/client I help.

- 3 I get satisfaction from being able to provide care for patients/clients.

- 4 I feel connected to others.

- 5 I jump or am startled by unexpected sounds.

- 6 I feel invigorated after working with those for whom I provide care.

- 7 I find it difficult to separate my personal life from my life as a care provider.

- 8 I am not as productive at work because I am losing sleep over traumatic experiences of a patient/client for whom I provide care.


9 I think that I might have been affected by the traumatic stress of those for whom I provide care.



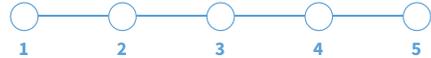
10 I feel trapped by my job as a care provider.



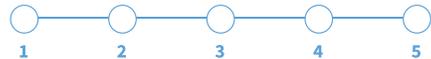
11 Because of my role as a care provider, I have felt on edge about various things.



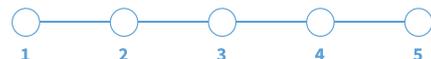
12 I like my work as a care provider.



13 I feel depressed because of the traumatic experiences of the patients/clients for whom I have provided care.



14 I feel as though I am experiencing the trauma of patients/clients for whom I have provided care.



15 I have beliefs that sustain me.



16 I am pleased with how I am able to keep up with veterinary techniques and protocols.



17 I am the person I always wanted to be.



18 My work makes me feel satisfied.



19 I feel worn out because of my work as a care provider.



20 I have happy thoughts and feelings about those for whom I provide care and how I can help them.



21 I feel overwhelmed because my case workload seems endless.



22 I believe I can make a difference through my work.



23 I avoid certain activities or situations because they remind me of frightening experiences of the patients/clients I help.



1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Very Often

24 I am proud of what I can do to provide care.

1 2 3 4 5

25 As a result of my helping, I have intrusive, frightening thoughts.

1 2 3 4 5

26 I feel “bogged down” by the system.

1 2 3 4 5

27 I have thoughts that I am a success as a care provider.

1 2 3 4 5

28 I can't recall important parts of my work with trauma victims.

1 2 3 4 5

29 I am a very caring person.

1 2 3 4 5

30 I am happy that I chose to do this work.

1 2 3 4 5

tally your score

Based on your responses, place your personal scores below. If you have any concerns, you should discuss them with a physical or mental healthcare professional.

A. Add your scores on questions:

3. _____

6. _____

12. _____

16. _____

18. _____

20. _____

22. _____

24. _____

27. _____

30. _____

Total: _____

B. Add your scores on questions:

1.* _____

4.* _____

8. _____

10. _____

15.* _____

17.* _____

19. _____

21. _____

26. _____

29.* _____

Total: _____

C. Add your scores on questions:

2. _____

5. _____

7. _____

9. _____

11. _____

13. _____

14. _____

23. _____

25. _____

28. _____

Total: _____

* For these questions, reverse your score. For example, 1 becomes 5.

Match your total for each list to the A,B, and C scales that follow.

A. compassion satisfaction scale

| The sum of my compassion fatigue questions was | So my score equals | My level of compassion fatigue |
|--|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| 22 or less | 43 or less | Low |
| Between 23 and 41 | Around 50 | Average |
| 42 or more | 57 or more | High |

Compassion satisfaction is about the pleasure you derive from being able to do your work well. For example, you may feel like it is a pleasure to help others through your work. You may feel positively about your colleagues or your ability to contribute to the work setting or even the greater good of society. Higher scores on this scale represent a greater satisfaction related to your ability to be an effective caregiver in your job.

The average score is 50 (SD 10; alpha scale reliability .88). About 25% of people score higher than 57 and about 25% of people score below 43. If you are in the higher range, you probably derive a good deal of professional satisfaction from your position. If your scores are below 40, you may either find problems with your job, or there may be some other reason--for example, you might derive your satisfaction from activities other than your job.

B. burnout scale

| The sum of my burnout questions was | So my score equals | My level of burnout |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 22 or less | 43 or less | Low |
| Between 23 and 41 | Around 50 | Average |
| 42 or more | 57 or more | High |

Most people have an intuitive idea of what burnout is. From the research perspective, burnout is one of the elements of compassion fatigue (CF). It is associated with feelings of hopelessness and difficulties in dealing with work or in doing your job effectively. These negative feelings usually have a gradual onset. They can reflect the feeling that your efforts make no difference, or they can be associated with a very high workload or a non-supportive work environment. Higher scores on this scale mean that you are at higher risk for burnout.

The average score on the burnout scale is 50 (SD 10; alpha scale reliability .75). About 25% of people score above 57 and about 25% of people score below 43. If your score is below 43, this probably reflects positive feelings about your ability to be effective in your work. If you score above 57, you may want to think about what at work makes you feel like you are not effective in your position. Your score may reflect your mood; perhaps you were having a “bad day” or are in need of some time off. If the high score persists or if it is reflective of other worries, it may be a cause for concern.

C. secondary traumatic stress

| The sum of my secondary traumatic stress questions was | So my score equals | My level of secondary traumatic stress |
|--|--------------------|--|
| 22 or less | 43 or less | Low |
| Between 23 and 41 | Around 50 | Average |
| 42 or more | 57 or more | High |

The second component of compassion fatigue (CF) is secondary traumatic stress (STS). It is about your work-related, secondary exposure to extremely or traumatically stressful events. Developing problems due to exposure to others' trauma is somewhat rare but does happen to many people who care for those who have experienced extremely or traumatically stressful events. For example, you may repeatedly hear stories about the traumatic things that happen to other people, commonly called vicarious traumatization. If your work puts you directly in the path of danger, for example, field work in a war or area of civil violence, this is not secondary exposure; your exposure is primary. However, if you are exposed to others' traumatic events as a result of your work, for example, as a therapist or an emergency worker, this is secondary exposure. The symptoms of STS are usually rapid in onset and associated with a particular event. They may include being afraid, having difficulty sleeping, having images of the upsetting event pop into your mind, or avoiding things that remind you of the event.

The average score on this scale is 50 (SD 10; alpha scale reliability .81). About 25% of people score below 43 and about 25% of people score above 57. If your score is above 57, you may want to take some time to think about what at work may be frightening to you or if there is some other reason for the elevated score. While higher scores do not mean that you do have a problem, they are an indication that you may want to examine how you feel about your work and your work environment. You may wish to discuss this with your supervisor, a colleague, or a health care professional.

Learn More

If you would like to learn more about compassion fatigue, please check the resources on page 40. You may also wish to discuss your results with a trusted confidant, your supervisor, or a healthcare professional.

combat

compassion fatigue

IN THE MOMENT

Take a self-assessment

Call a family member or trusted friend

Connect with colleagues
(Vent, share a story, celebrate a success)

Use humor

Try a deep breathing exercise
(Inhale 4 seconds, hold breath 7 seconds, exhale 8 seconds)

Focus on a peaceful photo

Repeat a mantra to yourself
to practice mindfulness and meditation

Write in a journal

Take a drive
(Get in the car and go. But please come back!)

Wash & change clothes
(Remove the day from yourself)

Combatting compassion fatigue isn't a quick fix. It takes a mixture of long and short-term strategies. Try these.

IN THE LONG-TERM

Connect with colleagues
(Have a weekly or monthly happy hour or planned activity)

Join social media groups or forums
with other animal health professionals

Set emotional boundaries

Seek help
from a healthcare professional

Practice yoga, meditation, or prayer
or other spiritual practices

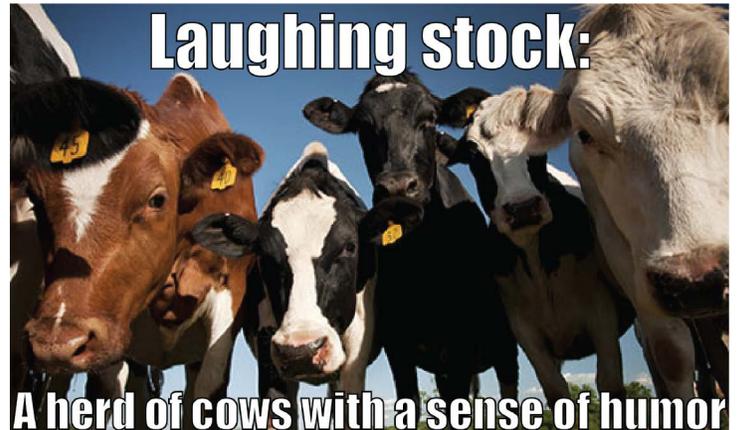
Take care of yourself physically
(Eat well, get adequate sleep, exercise regularly, actively relax)

why laugh?

Humor helps your psychological and physical well-being. It can help people cope with stress, adversity, and even grief. Laughter and the joy of humor is so powerful that a study by Dr. Dacher Keltner, professor at UC Berkeley and director of the Greater Good Science Center, found that people who experienced spontaneous amusement or laughter when discussing a deceased spouse showed better emotional adjustment in the years following the spouse's death than those who did not.

Laughter doesn't just help in our darkest moments. Laughing decreases stress hormones, triggers the release of endorphins, and increases circulating antibodies. A hearty laugh has been shown to benefit your circulation, lungs, and muscles. While humor doesn't solve difficult situations, it makes those moments more acceptable, and provides true health benefits.

Here are little bits of humor to keep in your back pocket, but we're also blessed on the Internet with the casual comedic brilliance freely given by people from around the world. Try searching funny cats, goofy dogs, or vet humor, or follow one of these funny subreddits.



serenity now!

Working In The Veterinary Field



What society thinks I do



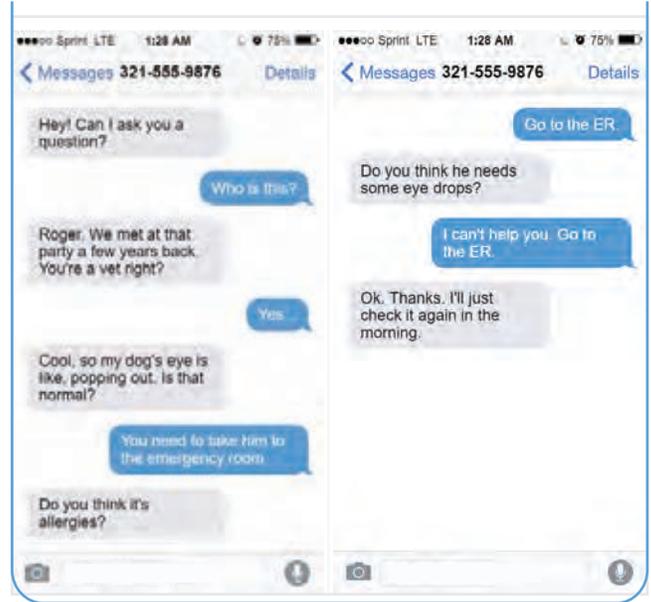
What my boss thinks I do



What pets think I do



What I actually do



WENT TO THE VET.



DIDN'T GET NEUTERED!

Insists on sitting at front desk



Refuses to answer the phone



WeRateVets - Follow
Austin, Texas



Liked by **Benji, Toto, Marley, Bolt** and 20 others

WeRateVets This is Superdoc and her patient Max. Max ate a bottle of tylenol while his person was at work. He thought they were treats and was too excited to stop and read the label. Superdoc is reminding him he's still a good boy. Max promises not to do it again. We believe you Max. Superdoc for the save. 13/10 for both.

[View all 2,121 comments](#)



Add a comment...

28 January

“ The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water and not get wet.

-Naomi Rachel Remen

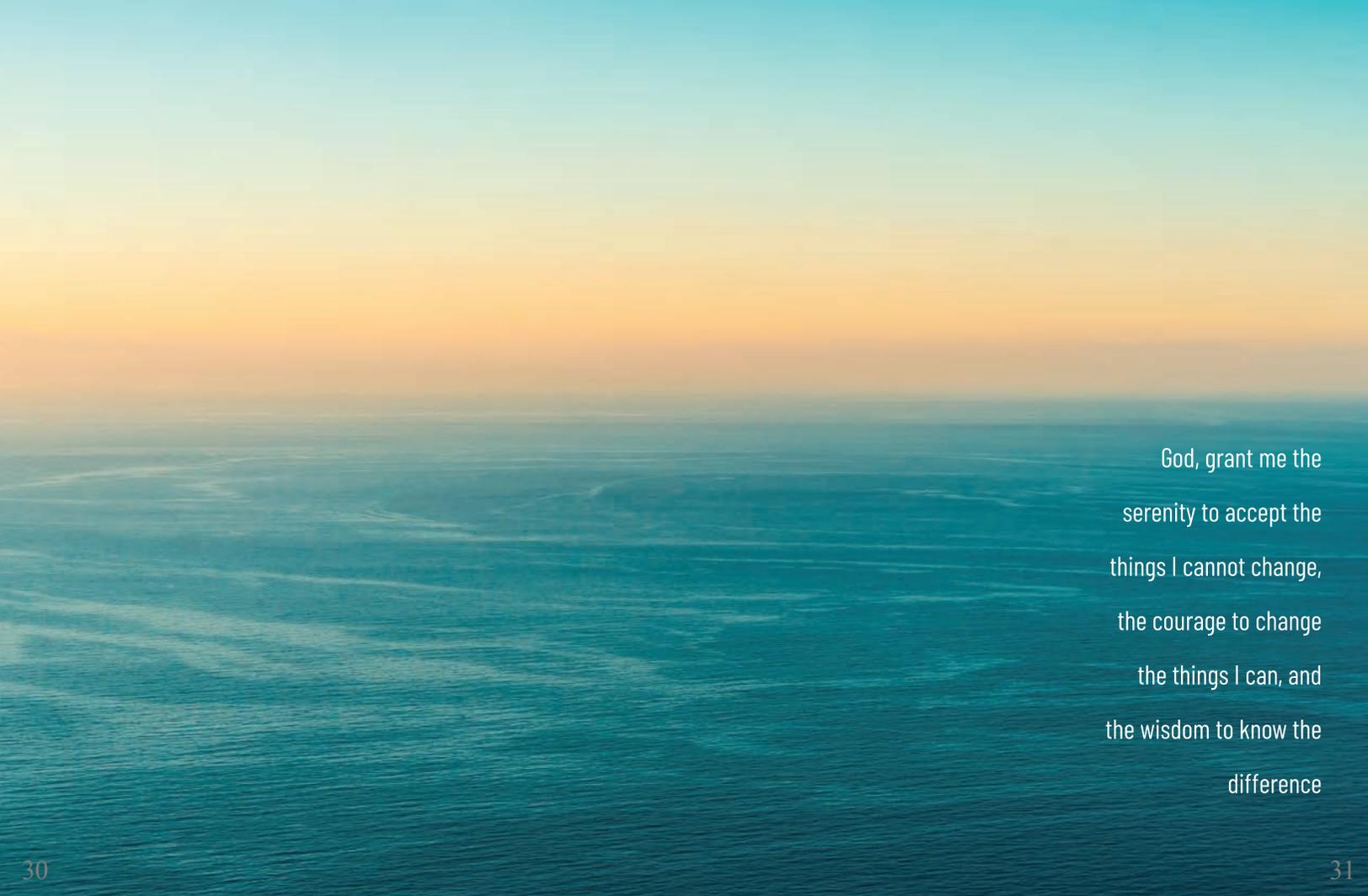
inspiration, & motivation, meditation

This is the power of words, a turn of a phrase that encapsulates our experience, a phrase that resonates with our experience and helps focus our feelings and response. Compassionate unconditional words of support in your worst moments help pull you through until you can start solving the problem from the other side. The message that someone believes in you is a powerful incentive to try harder or keep going. If you're running a race, and you hear people cheering you on to the finish line, you might find one last boost of energy to get you the last 100 yards.

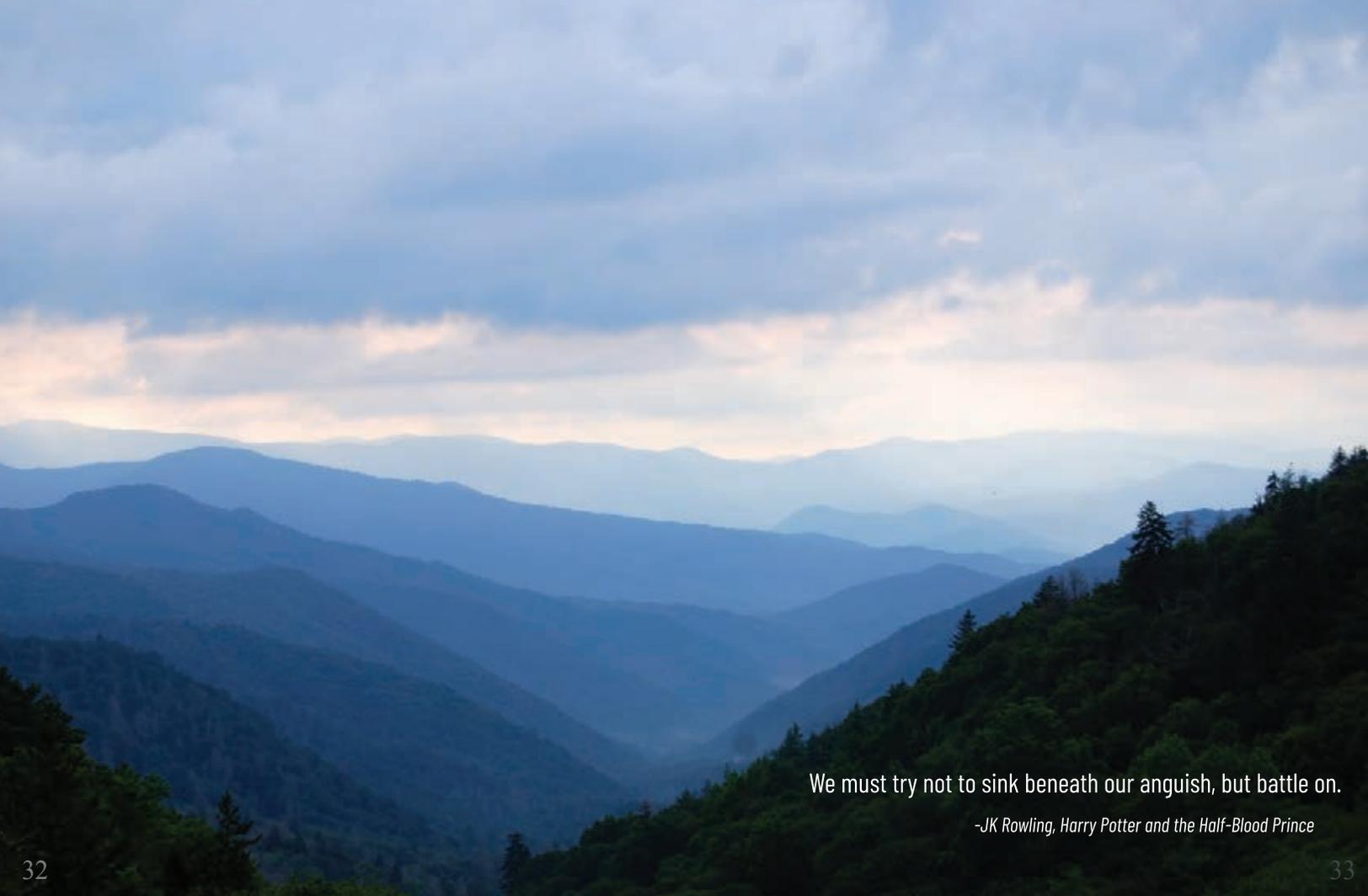
The following pages offer words that may help you focus your thoughts and feelings in a positive direction. Perhaps one will particularly resonate with you and become a mantra, an affirmation regularly repeated, you can use when you're working through a difficult period or incident. Repetition of a mantra has been shown to be helpful. The pages also offer peaceful pictures for meditation and relaxation. Calming nature pictures, like forests and oceans, are proven stress reducers; blue hues are known to lessen anxiety. Even a short duration, perhaps 60 seconds, viewing these pictures can have a calming effect.

“ Empathy is a finite resource. As a normal, psychological response, you cannot give of yourself again and again and again without replenishing.

Emmet Fitzgerald



God, grant me the
serenity to accept the
things I cannot change,
the courage to change
the things I can, and
the wisdom to know the
difference



We must try not to sink beneath our anguish, but battle on.

-JK Rowling, Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.

- Francis of Assisi





One person can make a difference, and everyone should try.

- John F. Kennedy



If your compassion doesn't include yourself, it isn't complete.

-Jack Kornfield, Buddha's Little Instruction Book

resources

for veterinarians & technicians

hotlines

Crisis Text Line: Text “home” to [741741](tel:741741)

National Suicide Prevention Hotline: [800.273.8255](tel:800.273.8255)

Vets4Vets: [530.794.8094](tel:530.794.8094)

social media groups

Not One More Vet

VIN Foundation Vets4Vets

Veterinary Support Staff Unleashed

music

Spotify: Innovative Petcare Calming Playlist

Youtube: Peaceful & Relaxing Instrumental Music-Long Playlist

apps

Breathing: Breathe2Relax, Headspace, Breathe

Stress Relief: Pacifica, Headspace, Calm, Moonpath, Happify

Mindfulness: Mindfulness Daily, Youper

Movement: Pocket Yoga, Yoga for Beginners, Colorfy

websites

compassionfatigue.org

selfcompassion.org

NOMV

VIN Foundation

AVMA on compassion fatigue

books

Compassion Fatigue in the Animal Related Community

Charles Figley & Robert Roop

Full Catastrophe Living: Coping with Stress, Pain, and Illness...

Jon Kabat-Zinn

When Helping Hurts: Compassion Fatigue in the Veterinary Profession

Charles Figley and Robert Roop

free resources

for innovative petcare team members

innovative PETCARE _____ we care about you

Our employees are our top priority at Innovative Petcare. All full-time employees enjoy a full range of benefits including PTO, health insurance with mental healthcare benefits, 401k, and more. Additionally, all employees can take advantage of our Employee Assistance Program (EAP). This program offers family support, legal and financial assistance, fitness resources, mental health resources, and work-related help to keep compassion fatigue, depression, and burnout at bay.

- Chat with a counselor immediately at ibhworklife.com or call **1.800.386.7055**
- Can't talk? Email a counselor at eapcounselor@ibhcorp.com
- Schedule face-to-face counseling through the EAP or your health insurance plan
- Consult with work-life specialists for family and caregiving support support, child and eldercare referrals, emotional wellbeing, and balancing work-life responsibilities. Call 1.800.386.7055 for services.
- Financial coaching and planning available at 1.800.386.7055
- Legal consultation and phone support 1.800.386.7055
- Library of resources at ibhworklife.com

yes, it's free!

Questions about how to access resources? Email hr@innovativepetcare.com or call **888.508.0610**.

**Never forget the value
of who you are and
what you do.**

-Innovative Petcare

you've got this
