

Core Competency Unit:

Self Care: Facilitator Paul Cumins

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From : J.D Guy & J.C Norcross: Therapist Self Care Checklist

“ The following list summarizes frequently used and commonly recommended methods of alleviating the distress of conducting psychotherapy or, more optimistically, of nourishing and replenishing the practitioner. Unfortunately, the extant literature on the "person of the therapist" and "burnout" has not progressed to the point where definitive self-care recommendations can be offered (Norcross & Aboyou, 1994; Schaufeli, Maslach, & Marek, 1993); thus, it is not an exhaustive or empirically driven compilation. Nonetheless, the list is a practical synthesis of clinical wisdom, research literature, and therapist experience on a multitude of self-care methods from disparate theoretical traditions. The list is adapted from a more extensive catalog of self-care activities published in our book, *Leaving It at the Office*”

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tations and needs, particularly when talking with colleagues. With which colleague can you be truly honest?

- . Consider why you became a psychotherapist and why you continue to practice. Look for ways to work through those motivations to practice that are unhealthy.
- . Fortunately, burnout and impairment among therapists are relatively rare phenomena. What steps are you taking to reduce their likelihood?

REFOCUS ON THE REWARDS OF PRACTICING PSYCHOTHERAPY

- . Focus on the rewards associated with clinical work that bring life and vitality. For example, recall the life-transforming psychotherapies in which you were privileged to participate.
 - Your emotional growth is one of your most important therapeutic tools. Is your tool being properly and regularly sharpened?
 - Satisfaction from helping others is essential. Be sure to include at least some clinical activities that demonstrate you're actually helping someone!
 - Enjoy maintaining relationships with clients that span years, or even decades, that include intermittent courses of treatment.
- . Ideally, your work will capitalize on both your natural and your acquired abilities. Do what you do well.
 - Be careful when applying your expertise to your family of origin ("Fools rush in where angels fear to tread").
 - How has clinical practice improved the quality of your friendships?
 - Remember that you are self-employed, regardless of who you work for. Adopting this perspective begets freedom of choice.
 - Clinical practice may not make you rich, but if it is your calling, it is a wonderful way to make a living.
 - There are many more benefits than hazards associated with the practice of psychotherapy. If you've forgotten this, find some methods to help you remember.

NURTURE RELATIONSHIPS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE OFFICE

- In one study of "well-functioning" psychologists (Coster & Schwebel, 1997), peer support emerged as the highest priority. How does your peer support fare?
- Are you getting enough "alone" time? Do you know what to do with it when it's available?
- Name the three most nurturing people in your life. What can you do to increase the amount of support that you receive from them?
- Ongoing peer supervision or consultation is highly valued by experienced clinicians throughout their careers. Do you have such arrangements in your own life? Under what circumstances are you willing to seek supervision or consultation?
- During a typical workday, who "recharges your batteries" best and brightens your day?
- Identify the client who provides you with the greatest amount of nurturance. How does this make you feel? How are you handling this?
- What have you learned about yourself as a result of experiencing a sense of loss following completion of treatment with a "favorite" client?
- Identify your most significant "mentor" during your career. What made this relationship so important? How are your needs for mentoring being met today?
- A spouse or significant other is an important source of nurturance for many clinicians. How important is this in your life? Why or why not?
- Utilize your family-of-origin relationships to help you reality test and to confront your grandiosity. These folks will in all likelihood be honest with you if invited!
- Have your friendships become fewer in number and diminished in significance over the years of professional practice? Why or why not?
- Who is your personal "guru"? Who helps you derive meaning?
 - Something is seriously wrong if you are giving out more nurturance than you are receiving. Take corrective action!

SET BOUNDARIES, CLARIFY RELATIONSHIPS

- Setting boundaries emerges in our research as the most frequent self-care strategy of mental health professionals (Norcross & Guy, in press). Be clear with your clients about personal needs, expectations, and boundaries.
- Clearly delineate your policies regarding extra sessions, late appointments, telephone contacts, payment for services rendered, and the like.
- Your work expresses a combination of personal style, theoretical orientation, and individual preference. You will bend to suit your clients' needs, but not much.
- Clarify your expectations of your clients early in your work. What are the ground rules for treatment?
- Saying good-bye to clients well requires clear statements concerning how, when, and why treatment may resume in the future.
- Understand what your client needs most, and don't allow that goal to be compromised by conflicting roles and agendas.
- Your clients are not there to meet your needs; treatment relationships are not reciprocal.
- Define your relationships with colleagues and staff with care. Transference influences these relationships, too.
- Establishing an identity apart from your role as a clinician will enrich your private life with variety and meaning. Don't get stale!
- Let your hair down with family and friends. They want you to be genuine, spontaneous, and "unprofessional."

EMPLOY COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING

- Self-monitor your internal dialogue, either implicitly or explicitly, particularly in regard to countertransference feelings.
- Monitor what Ellis calls "stinking thinking" through introspection, reflection, using triple column

- logs, or sharing concerns with others.
- . Think through your reactions to transference feelings directed to you. To whom are they aimed, and to whom do they belong?
- . Beware of absolutistic thinking: "musturbation" and the "tyranny of the shoulds." They can affect you as much as your patients.
 - Dispute the common fallacy that "good psychotherapy is equivalent to having patients who like us." It is not!
- . Yes, you are an expert on human behavior but you're still nutty at times!
- . Recall that the other side of caring consists of confrontation. At times, caring about others includes being tough.
 - Reassure yourself that the conditions in psychotherapy as well as in life, are not always easy. This is unfortunate but not the end of the world.
- . To fail is human. To consider yourself a failure is not divine.
 - Remind yourself that you cannot cure every patient.
 - Dwell on your successes as well as your failures.
 - Assertively lessen unrealistic demands made on you: don't take on more work than necessary or wrongly believe you're expected to do more.
- . Catch yourself when you assume personal causality. Self-deprecation is self-defeating!
 - Consider alternate explanations that may cause events. Psychotherapy is not the only causal event in clients' lives.
 - Calculate real probabilities. The worst does not always happen-to you or to your patients.
 - Evaluate events on a continuum to avoid dichotomous thinking; psychotherapy outcomes are rarely on either extreme of a continuum.

SUSTAIN HEALTHY ESCAPES

- We occasionally become so intent and focused on sophisticated self-care methods
 - that we overlook the basics. What is the quality of your sleep, your nutrition, your body? Do you obtain sufficient exercise and healthy food during the day, or, as one of us discovered himself doing a few years ago, are you subsisting throughout the day without exercise and with only diet soda and hard pretzels?
 - Increase your sensory awareness: Beholding your surroundings using vision, hearing, touch, gustation, and olfaction can be a powerful elixir and can counterbalance the primarily cognitive and affective work of psychotherapy.
 - A sense of humor is one of your most important stress relievers. Practice!
- . Take your own advice: Exercise and relax regularly.
- . Take a minibreak between sessions to selfmassage your face and neck muscles; perhaps schedule regular massages to nourish yourself and relieve muscle tension.
 - Mahoney (1997) reports that over 80% of therapists routinely engage in reading or a hobby, take pleasure trips or vacations, and attend artistic events and movies as part of their self-care patterns. Is your life balanced?
 - Monitor your vacation and down time. Is it less than you as a psychotherapist would recommend to patients in similarly stressful occupations?
 - Pace your day, space appointments, and take a break or two.
 - How much adventure and other diversions do you have away from the office? Is play a steady staple of your emotional diet?
 - Support groups and peer supervision groups offer multiple advantages. Please consider joining one.
 - Involvement in other professional activities balances your workload and expresses a full array of your skills. Psychotherapy, teaching, supervision, consultation, assessment, and writing are all part of the mental health professional landscape.

- Variety and intellectual stimulation are important. Mix up your therapy days: individual, marital, and family formats; younger and older patients; talk therapy and action

therapy. What else can you do to increase variety and novelty in your schedule?

UNDERGO PERSONAL THERAPY

- Freud (1964) recommended that every therapist should periodically-at intervals of 5 years or so-reenter or initiate psychotherapy *without shame* as a form of continued education. Do you heed his sage advice? Do you struggle with the shame?
- . Between 52 % and 65 % of psychotherapists enter personal treatment following completion of formal training (Norcross & Guy, in press). Do you subscribe to the illusion -or perhaps the delusion-that mental health professionals do not experience a need for personal therapy once they are in practice?
- Can you give yourself 50 minutes of time every week or two in a holding environment? Are you practicing what you preach regarding the value of psychotherapy?
- If you do not participate in formal psychotherapy, consider an annual satisfaction checkup with a valued mentor, trusted colleague, or former therapist.

CREATE A FLOURISHING ENVIRONMENT

- In our research on the frequency of self-care methods (Brady, Norcross, & Guy, 1995), psychotherapists rate "making organizational changes at the practice" the least common method. We believe they do so at considerable risk. Do you fall prey to American individualism and neglect systemic forces inside and outside your office?
- Are your clinical talents and interpersonal interests poorly invested in paperwork? If so, consider a computer, a clerical assistant, or other alternatives.
- . Look for ways to create a greater sense of freedom and independence in your work.
 - Enhance your work environment: comfort in your furniture, aesthetics in your decor, replenishment in your refrigerator, and nourishment in your peers.

CULTIVATE SPIRITUALITY AND MISSION

- We emphasize the personal experience of spirituality, or what Maslow called "mission." Can you identify and resonate to an abiding mission or spirituality?
- . What is your sense of "calling" to be a clinician? What are the spiritual antecedents to your career choice?
- Your work grows out of a legacy of "healers" that extends back for many centuries. Try to feel connected to that heritage and to the privilege of practicing psychotherapy.
- What are the spiritual sources of your hope and optimism regarding human nature?
- A sense of personal mission can fruitfully incorporate larger societal concerns, such as enhancing women's rights, promoting social justice, teaching conflict resolution, eradicating poverty, and abolishing sexual abuse. Where are your sympathies?
- If you've lost your enduring sense of care and concern for others, get help!
- Optimism and belief in the potential for personality change are prerequisites for good clinical practice. Assess yourself and then ask a friend to assess you.
- How does your belief in a mission, God, or a transcendent force serve as a resource for you? Are you squarely confronting your own yearnings for a sense of transcendence and meaning?
- Who serves as a "spiritual mentor" for you? Is this adequate?
- . Since the practice of psychotherapy is not meant to provide ultimate meaning for your life, what does? What should?

FOSTER CREATIVITY AND GROWTH

- Opportunities for dedicated reflection and discernment are a professional obligation, not a

luxury. How often do you engage in spiritual exercises, journaling, meditation, or other forms of renewal?

- Are you finding ways of nurturing your creativity? Are staleness and repetition starting to get you down?
- Attending clinical conferences, reading literature, and continuing your education are the life springs of a committed professional. Do you feel you are just "getting CE hours" or truly refining and building your skills?
- Kottler (1991, p. 238) declares, "Everything comes together for a therapist in the creative process." How are you coming together, nourishing yourself, and growing as a psychotherapist?

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