

HOOP DANCING TO PREVENT AND DECREASE BURNOUT AND COMPASSION FATIGUE

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Think for a moment of a life without play. Dr. Stuart Brown, the President of the National Institute for Play, argued that the opposite of play is depression, stating that play is vital to our survival.¹ Creating conversation about the prevalence and challenges of burnout and compassion fatigue among nurses, while discussing the positive effects of hoop dancing as a form of body play for movement meditation, can aide in prevention of this occupational hazard.

Compassion Fatigue and Burnout

Najjar et al. stated that compassion fatigue usually occurs in caring professionals who absorb the traumatic stress of those they help.² Emergency nurses provide safe, holistic, compassionate, physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual care to multiple patients at one time. Patients and their families often present to the emergency setting in crisis. Due to the nature of their work, emergency nurses bear witness to an enormous amount of physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering. Exposure to this type of continued traumatic stress places emergency nurses at risk for developing compassion fatigue and burnout.³⁻⁷

Burnout and compassion fatigue are easily confused with one another and can be experienced individually or in combination. Burnout is a prolonged response to chronic

job-related emotional and interpersonal stressors and is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and feelings of diminished personal accomplishment.^{7,8} Burnout can lead to negative health outcomes for the nurse involved and impacts overall organizational effectiveness.⁹

Although there are several definitions of compassion fatigue in the literature, Joinson first described this phenomena in 1992 while researching burnout in emergency department nurses¹⁰. Compassion fatigue is described as a “combination of physical, emotional, and spiritual depletion associated with caring for patients in significant emotional pain and physical distress.”¹⁰ Symptoms of compassion fatigue vary and may include increased use of sick days, lack of joyfulness at work, reduced empathy, headaches, muscle tension, fatigue, mood swings, irritability, depression, difficulty sleeping, and resentment.^{10,11}

Management of compassion fatigue and burnout includes (1) prevention, (2) assessment, and (3) intervention.⁵ To prevent and decrease compassion fatigue and/or burnout nurses must work at practicing mental, physical, and spiritual balance. Many interventions decrease and prevent compassion fatigue and burnout, including maintaining a healthy work/life balance and work-setting interventions such as on-site counseling, support groups for staff, debriefing sessions, art and expressive therapy, massage sessions, and bereavement interventions.⁵ Engaging in self-care activities, such as meditation, exercise, and body play may also prevent compassion fatigue and burnout among nurses.

Body Play

Play does not have a particular purpose. Play simply seeks out joy for the sake of joy. While play is gratifying, it is also vital to mental, physical, and spiritual well-being. Engaging in play has been found to enhance learning and cognition, improves the ability to handle stress, elevates mood, and promotes social skills, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution ability.¹² Body play involves physical movement and includes a variety of activities including dancing and hoop dancing.

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The Hula Hoop and Hoop Dancing

The hula hoop is described as a prop or a toy that has been used for play and therapeutic purposes.¹³ Although the hoop is a simple plastic circle, designed for all ages and sizes, people who connect with it have shared how hoop dancing has opened their lives to sense of balance, deep healing, and wellness. Hula hooping has existed for thousands of years. It has been documented as early as 1000 B. C., in ancient Egypt, where hoops were made from grape vines and bent wood.¹³ In addition, the famous Greek physician, Hippocrates, who placed emphasis on using the healing power of nature as a therapeutic approach to treating disease, documented prescribing hoop rolling exercises for healing weak backs.¹³

Hoop dancing requires presence, passion, persistence, a positive attitude, and results in a feeling of letting go. Many who have engaged in the art of hoop dancing have found that the space inside the hoop's circle creates a tangible boundary providing a comforting sense of safety and allowing for self-expression.¹³ Others that have engaged in hoop dancing describe their experience as a moving meditation, where all planning ceases and focus creates space for the present moment. Meditation in movement, such as hoop dancing, allows the dancer to feel joyful and peaceful through their self-expression.

Conclusion

Burnout and compassion fatigue are occupational hazards that emergency nurses can experience, causing decreased workplace satisfaction, decreased patient satisfaction, and increased healthcare costs.^{2,3,9} If the plethora of challenges healthcare is experiencing are not addressed, nurses will continue to be at risk for occupational hazards such as burnout and compassion fatigue. Encouraging emergency nurses to participate in some form of play may influence feelings of joy and peace. Additionally, engaging in body play activities, like hoop dancing, may be a beneficial expressive art therapy intervention to prevent or decrease burnout and/or compassion fatigue among emergency nurses.

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