The Challenge of Caring: On Compassion Fatigue, Resilience and Healing

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From The helper's journey: Working with people facing grief, loss, and life-threatening illness.

“It makes perfect sense that, for us to survive as a species, acts of helping would be rewarded both psychologically and immunologically. What if each act of caring and helping depleted the helper, decreased his or her immunity and mood, and lessened the chances of survival? The view that caring and helping are natural processes and they are good for us is intuitively and scientifically more accurate. When we help another person, we take part in a process shaped and finely tuned over millions of years to ensure that when we help others we also help ourselves.” (p. 26)

“Young emotional involvement as a helper varies not only in intensity but also in the quality and kinds of emotions you have. The varieties of emotional experience possible for you as a helper can be illustrated in the metaphor of the Helper's Pit. Imagine that the person you're helping is in a pit and you are on the edge of that pit. If you identify with this person's problems, what happens? You fall into the pit! If you empathize, you feel with the person in the pit and get inside his or her experiential world. If you sympathize, you stand on the edge of the pit, and are concerned and compassionate--sympathy is feeling for the person in distress.” (p. 38)

“To meet the challenge of caring, you must find balance on your helping journey, balance between the demands you face and the resources you have to meet them, between giving to others and giving to yourself.” (p. 57)
REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

PUBLICATIONS BY DR. LARSON


Larson, D. G. (2001). It’s time to talk: The most important conversations often are the most difficult to have. Article published as part of the Knight Ridder newspaper series Finding our way: Living with dying in America. Can be obtained at www.scu.edu/Hospice or www.scu.edu/fow or www.findingourway.net


ONLINE RESOURCES

The Finding Our Way Online Course: www.scu.edu/fow

The Finding Our Way: Living With Dying in America national newspaper series appeared in more than 170 newspapers, reaching millions of Americans (www.findingourway.net). That series consisted of 15 articles created by a distinguished group of authors and editors, and was funded by the Robert Wood Johnson, Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels, and Charitable Leadership Foundations. This web-based course offers an opportunity for Americans to continue to learn from the widely read newspaper series. The 15 Finding Our Way articles, and the inspiring stories they contain, are the heart of this course. In addition, the Finding Our Way authors have contributed discussion questions, additional resources, and insights that are important components of the course. The discussion questions can be used for small group discussion or for individual reflection, and the course can be taken at any time and at any pace that works for you. Upon successful completion of the course and the final examination, an electronic certificate of completion will be issued to you. No continuing education units are available for this learning experience. The course is ideal for use as a supplement to academic courses, in staff and volunteer training, and in community education.

The Hospice Home Page www.scu.edu/Hospice This award-winning site has “great ideas” for hospice programs and access to many resources for hospice and palliative care, including many articles and lectures by Dr. Larson.

RELATED BOOKS AND ARTICLES


Tirch, D. D. (2010). Mindfulness as a context for the cultivation of compassion. *International Journal of Cognitive Therapy, 3*(2), 113-123. doi: 10.1521/ijct.2010.3.2.113
