Compassion Fatigue
Exploring early-career oncology nurses’ experiences

Brooke A. Finley, BSN, RN-BC, and Kate G. Sheppard, PhD, RN, FNP, PMHNP-BC, FAANP

BACKGROUND: Oncology nurses have a higher risk and rate of compassion fatigue (CF) compared to professionals in other specialties. CF exhibits tangible negative outcomes, affecting nurses’ health and professional practice.

OBJECTIVES: Early-career oncology nurses’ unique CF experiences lack thorough scientific exploration. This secondary analysis seeks to qualitatively augment this paucity and illuminate targeted interventions.

METHODS: Open-ended interviews were conducted with five early-career inpatient oncology nurses. Subsequent transcripts were explored for CF themes secondarily using thematic analysis.

FINDINGS: Themes indicate that early-career oncology nurses enjoy connecting with patients and families, but over-relating, long patient stays, and high patient mortality rates trigger CF. Symptoms include internalizing patients’ and families’ pains and fears, being haunted by specific patient deaths, feeling emotionally depleted, assuming that all patients will die, and experiencing burnout, physical exhaustion, and hypervigilance protecting loved ones.

KEYWORDS compassion fatigue; burnout; secondary traumatic stress; emotional saturation

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