@ Home

Episode: Compassion Fatigue in LTC

**Brooke Thornbrugh**

Welcome to our podcast at home today we have Gove County. Here to talk about compassion fatigue and how they have worked with their staff to educate them on this topic. Would each of you start off by introducing yourselves and telling us a little bit about you?

**Denise Woodworth**

Yes, my name is Denise Woodworth. I'm the Director of Nursing at Gulf County Medical Center. I've been in the long-term care field starting, like 86, probably 85. I started out as a CNA, later, I went to school to be a nurse, I became an LPN first and then an RN, did a little job at MDS Coordinator and then became a DON following that. So, I ran a small business with my husband for about 10 years. Otherwise, I've been in the medical field since the 80s. So anyway, that's a little about me, I have two children and some grandchildren.

**Wade Richard**

Yeah. And first, first of all, thank you for having us today. We appreciate that. My name is Wade Richard, I'm the marketing manager here at Gove County Medical Center. I've held this role for about three and a half years and previous to that I never had worked in healthcare before. I actually worked in the automotive industry for about 13 years doing marketing. And so, it's a huge change. But it's also very challenging and enjoy quite a bit. Married going on 28 years have three kids and my oldest is a marine. So

**Brooke Thornbrugh**

Well sounds like both of you have been very busy. And it's so interesting to hear about your backgrounds and how you got into the long-term care world but it's so great to have you both on here. Can you just start out by telling us a little bit about what compassion fatigue is?

**Denise Woodworth**

Okay, so compassion, fatigue, some symptoms of that would be mood swings, decreased interactions with others, irritability or lack of patience with other people, feelings of hopelessness or powerlessness, poor self-care, beginning to receive a lot of complaints about your attitude or performance, difficulty sleeping, possible nightmares, physical mental fatigue, difficulty concentrating, blaming others for their suffering, or feeling less productive at work.

**Brooke Thornbrugh**

Yeah lots there lots of symptoms, lots of things that possibly show up and compassion fatigue is around. What has been your experience with compassion fatigue in your home? And what prompted it?

**Wade Richard**

Well I think, you know, everybody can agree that COVID has been hard on everybody. And so when that all came out, we actually had to take the role of a lot of different people in our residents lives such as, you know, we had to be their family, we had to be their pastors. You know, we were just as worried about bringing it into the facility. You know, and being the cause for it. But, you know, all in all, we've learned a lot through all that. And I think that it has it has worn on our staff, I think that's probably, you know, when it first came on, and you know, even now with the way things are with the we have a number of jobs that are opening, so you have less workers to actually have to do all the workload. You know, they love their jobs, they love their residents, but it just wears on.

**Brooke Thornbrugh**

You, they don't do just enough about that when we start out in these jobs, or we take on lots of different responsibilities, and especially during COVID nobody knew.

**Wade Richard**

Yeah

**Brooke Thornbrugh**

Well, how did you address compassion fatigue in your home?

**Denise Woodworth**

So, one thing that we do every day is we meet together, at huddle time, we huddle in the morning, and then we huddle. Also, in the for the evening shift. We stress very much open communication, because we find that if we have our staff feel comfortable talking with each other about issues that they're facing at work, that we can work through some of these issues, before anything, you know, gets too stressful. So just trying very hard to have a healthy work environment and putting the work into that, that we need to

**Wade Richard**

I think it's I think it's also important to note that that comes with good leadership and so such as Denise here who's director of nursing, it's recognizing no symptoms, as we said earlier, and addressing them, showing compassion for those who are being compassionate. And just doing anything we can do to be supportive and keep open communication.

**Denise Woodworth**

We also do self-scheduling so that they can take the days off they need to the important days with their families, and we help cover our interdisciplinary team has been amazing to help cover shift. CNA shifts regularly, to make sure that our residents have had the care that they need and deserve.

**Brooke Thornbrugh**

Sounds like you're trying to really normalize this as a part of making it if we talk about it more, and you talk about it more than hopefully it will be able to come up easier or so then we can address it sooner. Yeah, how have you changed any practices in your home to support team members in your home?

**Wade Richard**

You know, I think everybody's changed, you know, you know, during COVID, when everything had to be put on the wayside, we're now back in what we consider a sense of norm. And we encourage volunteers, we have a parent family advisory council. So we have support from that, which is community support. And most recently, due to looking at the employment opportunities, we did create a CNA class, we are proud to say that that class is going to be held here this month, and we've got it fold. So that's a really good thing. So creating that we created that to help to help support those that work here. And also take those open employment opportunities that maybe you're not being fulfilled by the applicant by the ads that are out there. And being I guess, a little bit more progressive in trying to create those opportunities by bringing up our own.

**Brooke Thornbrugh**

Did you find any resources that other homes might find beneficial in dealing with compassion fatigue?

**Denise Woodworth**

You know, the other thing that we are trying to do right now, because we're still not able to have you know, family members come in for group activities, that is a necessary thing. So we do host showers for our staff, if they're getting married or having a baby so that they can still have that community need filled. Not that we haven't been able to get our residents out more. As you know, visitation is opened up and as such, but that's kind of a sense of normal that they're, they're lacking. So, we did that throughout COVID as well for them so they can have that need met. So, we also have been very involved in making sure that our ministers in the area got their COVID vaccinations with us with through our clinic, and our volunteers so that we get keep that program strong and do all we could.

**Wade Richard**

And I wouldn't necessarily say that we took a lot away from other homes, we just thought it through as much as possible. I'm personally a musician. So whenever we wanted to bring some sense of norm to the residents, we couldn't bring in any outside entertainment, which they were used to. So I started playing down here and the long term care. And it's actually been a tradition that we started during COVID. And I'm actually talking to them about another date here coming up this summer. So they really enjoy it. So. But I also wanted to add on your previous question about any practices are in our home or anything that we've changed, just one of the things we have obviously raised wages, so we're very, very competitive in our wages as well. And we consider ourselves to be very competitive in a market.

**Denise Woodworth**

We have a very strong community here that supports the long-term care. That's been a blessing.

**Wade Richard**

Yeah that has been.

**Brooke Thornbrugh**

sounds like you guys are doing the most to keep your staff at the home. Is there anything about compassion fatigue, that I didn't ask that you feel like is important for other homes, to know or other people who are in this long-term care industry to know about compassion fatigue?

**Denise Woodworth**

It might be such as just calling your local mental health clinics and seeing what they have available because you know, like they came here for us for a staff meeting and talked about compassion fatigue, and gave us some resources for our staff, but you reach out to them because there might be resources out there that could help staff that you're not even aware exist, especially as we go forward.

**Wade Richard**

Yeah, and I think it's I think it's really interesting, you know, not having a background in healthcare, that, although we are competing with other facilities, we work together very well. I personally have a lot of colleagues that are the marketing managers at other facilities, and I can collaborate with them, I can bounce ideas off. And so, the same holds true for anything that any other home may be dealing with is that, you know, we're open to communication from other facilities about what's working, what's not working. And so, I guess that that would be something we put out there. We're always open to opening up a conversation.

**Brooke Thornbrugh**

Well, thank you both for being a part of our podcast and talking about compassion, fatigue, our podcast needs homes and people like you to get involved, and to share experiences so that as a community, people can come together, learn what works, what doesn't work, be in contact with each other. And so, this is just so important to talk about. Thank you so much for being on here today.

**Wade Richard**

Thanks for having us.

**Denise Woodworth**

Thank you.