

# CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT USING VR TECHNOLOGY TO ENHANCE EMPATHETIC COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN FUTURE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS



## INTELLECTUAL OUTPUT 7: TUTOR GUIDE FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS (VET) EQF Level 5 - WORK AREA 3.2

### ACTIVITY IO7A2: DEVELOPMENT OF THE TUTOR GUIDE



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

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## PROJECT MAIN DETAILS

<b>Programme:</b>	Erasmus+
<b>Key Action:</b>	Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices
<b>Project title:</b>	Curriculum Development using VR technology to enhance empathetic communication skills in future health care professionals
<b>Project Acronym:</b>	EmpathyInHealth
<b>Project Agreement Number:</b>	2019-1-CY01-KA203-058432
<b>Start Date:</b>	01/09/2019
<b>End Date:</b>	31/08/2022

## PROJECT PARTNERS





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## 1. DETAILED TOPIC LIST

<b>Work Area ID</b>	<b>3.2</b>	
<b>Work Area</b>	<b>Showing empathy in diverse environments and overcoming barriers/ challenges to empathy</b>	
<b>Unit</b>	<b>3.2 Challenges to empathy in caregiving and how to overcome these</b>	
<b>Learning outcomes correspond to EQF</b>	<b>Level 5</b>	
<b>Learning outcomes</b>		
<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Skills</b>	<b>Competences</b>
<i>He/she is able to</i>	<i>He/she is able to</i>	<i>He/she is able to</i>
42. Identify and label challenges to empathy in care 43. Define burnout and describe the relationship between empathy and burnout 44. Identify and Label evidence-based instruments for assessing burnout and stress-related conditions in care Professionals 45. Identify and label methods for preventing and/or treating burn out	46. Use self-reflection to recognise symptoms that you might be burnt out 47. Use appropriate resources for testing your symptoms of burn-out 48. Practice techniques to reduce stress and burn-out 49. Know what to do in case of burnout	50. Advocate and model self-caring attitudes 51. Increase self-confidence in self-caring under stressful situations 52. Model a positive, calm and mindful approach when dealing with stressful situations

## 2. TRAINING METHODS

- Classroom Teaching
- Asynchronous Electronic Learning
- Directed Self Learning



### 3. TRAINING TECHNIQUES

- Lecture
- Role Play
- VR Videos
- Educational Videos

### 4. WORK AREA 3.2 AT A GLANCE

Activity	Time in minutes	Work Area	Unit	LOs
<b>Face to Face Training</b>				
Challenges to empathy in care and emotional labour	60	3.2	3.2	
Burnout – Definitions and implications	30	3.2	3.2	
Empathic distress	30	3.2	3.2	
Interventions for dealing with burnout	60	3.2	3.2	
Practice	60	3.2	3.2	
	240 min = 4 hours			



## 5. TRAINING MATERIALS

### 5.1 POWERPOINT PRESENTATION: WORK AREA 3.2

Slide 1

Curriculum development using VR technology to enhance empathetic communication skills in future health care professionals

1

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Curriculum development using VR technology to enhance empathetic communication skills in future health care professionals

2

**Project Coordinator:**  **MMC** Mediterranean Management Centre [www.mmclearningsolutions.com](http://www.mmclearningsolutions.com)

**Project partners**



<https://www.unic.ac.cy/el/>



<http://www.cycert.org.cy/index.php/el/>



<https://www.vub.be/>



<https://www.charite.de/en/>



<https://www.uth.gr/>



<http://www.omegatech.gr/>





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**Work Area 3.2: *Challenges to Empathy***  
Unit 3.2: Challenges to empathy in healthcare and how to overcome these

Duration: 35 hours  
Trainer:



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**Learning Outcomes (knowledge)**

You should be able to:

42. Identify and label challenges to empathy in care
43. Define burnout and describe the relationship between empathy and burnout
44. Identify and Label evidence-based instruments for assessing burnout and stress-related conditions in care Professionals
45. Identify and label methods for preventing and/or treating burn out







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Learning Outcomes (skills)

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- 46. Use self-reflection to recognise symptoms that you might be burnt out
- 47. Use appropriate resources for testing your symptoms of burn-out
- 48. Practice techniques to reduce stress and burn-out
- 49. Know what to do in care of burnout

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Learning Outcomes (competences)

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- 50. Advocate and model self-caring attitudes
- 51. Increase self-confidence in self-caring under stressful situations
- 52. Model a positive, calm and mindful approach when dealing with stressful situations



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## Some helpful rules

- ▶ Mobile Phones
- ▶ Breaks
- ▶ Other



# Participation

# Respect

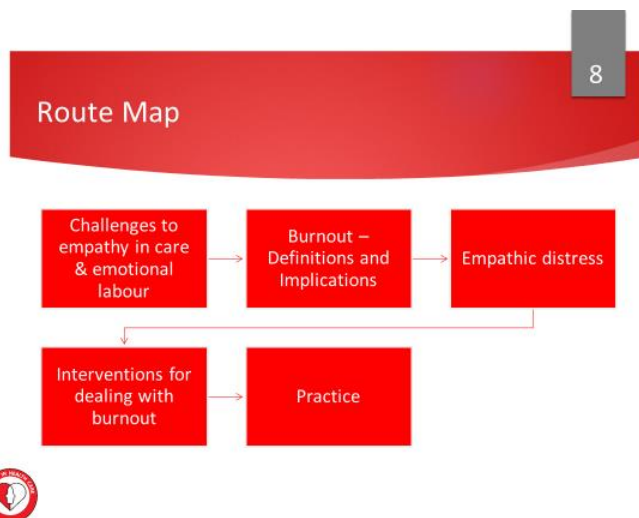
## Express your opinion



Some ground rules that each group should have:

- Be on time
- Mobiles off
- Do not interrupt others
- Equal participation by all members
- Feel free to ask questions
- Do not put down or make fun of others
- You have the right to disagree but do so respectfully
- Always offer positive feedback first and then feedback on things that can be improved on, in a constructive manner

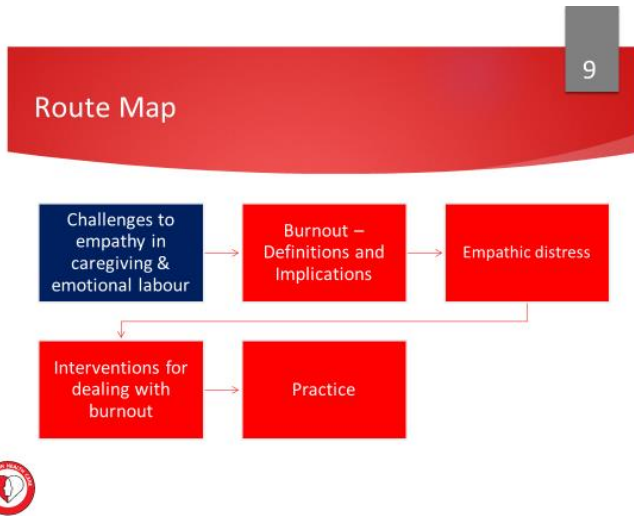
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ACTIVITY IO7A2: DEVELOPMENT OF THE TUTOR GUIDE



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## Challenges to empathy in caregiving

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## Impact of stress

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Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2HS-kjotb4&t=22s>

Trainees can watch the video about the impact of stress and then discuss it.

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## Challenges to Empathy in Caregiving

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- ▶ Workplace stress = threat to professionals **empathic ability**
  - ▶ Stress can cause anxiety and trigger individuals to fall back on what they know to be true —namely, their **own perspectives and feelings**  
(Ahrweiler et al., 2014)



Here we can explore further the idea of falling back to own perspectives and feelings and how stress plunges individuals into the familiar in order to cope with it. Sometimes this state of being is devoid of any empathic traits and it can actually lead to the opposite of empathy like aggression etc.

A survey in the US has found that 55% of health care workers reported burnout at some point in their lives.



Slide 13

## Challenges to Empathy in Care

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- ▶ High levels of workplace stress among health care professionals (Rice, Glass et al., 2014)
- ▶ Survey in the US indicated that 55%, **more than half** of health care workers reported burnout



A survey in the US has found that 55% of health care workers reported burnout related stress at some point in their lives.

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## Factors Related to Workplace Stress in Care Professionals

14

- ▶ **Cultural and organization factors:**
  - ▶ Undervaluing of carers
  - ▶ Staff shortages
- ▶ **Care related factors**
  - ▶ Personally demanding encounters
  - ▶ Exposure to strong emotions in patients
  - ▶ Requirement to be empathic
- ▶ **Individual factors**
  - ▶ Age
  - ▶ Work experience
  - ▶ Emotional response



This is from a model that described the different categories of stress in health care professionals. Cultural and organizational factors are related to undervaluing of carers and staff shortages. Care related factors are personally demanding encounters, exposure to strong emotions in patients and requirement to be empathic. Finally individual factors include age work experience and emotional reaction to certain stimuli.

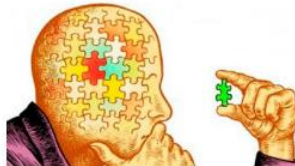
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## Group exercise: Stressors in my work environment

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▶ Please reflect in groups:

- ▶ Which of the factors described are relevant to your current work situation/to your work environment?
- ▶ Give some examples



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## The Concept of Emotional Labour

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- ▶ Emotional labour
- ▶ = effort involved in managing feelings when the work role specifies that **particular emotions (e.g. empathy)** should be displayed and others should be hidden.



Emotional labour means many things to many people. But, put simply, it's when someone feels the need to suppress their own emotions.

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## The Concept Of Emotional Labour: Strong elements of care

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- ▶ Care has **strong elements** of jobs requiring emotional labour:
  - ▶ need for connection with clients
  - ▶ coping with isolation
  - ▶ managing extremely stressful situations
  - ▶ need for providing specialised care



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## Brainstorming – Is Empathy Emotion Work for Care Professionals?

18

- ▶ The concept of **emotional work** is based on the assumption that the “appropriate” emotional response (e.g. in health care = empathy) will not always arise spontaneously
- ▶ Please ‘think, pair, share’:
  - ▶ Do you find it always easy to be empathic?
  - ▶ Have you ever experienced/or witnessed a situation where it was difficult for you/ a colleague to show empathy?
  - ▶ How did you/your colleague deal with that situation?





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## Empathy as Emotional Labour in Healthcare

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- ▶ Empathy = fundamental requirement in all healthcare professions
- ▶ Showing empathy and avoiding expressions of negative feelings toward clients are **essential job role expectations** in health care
- ▶ Showing empathy whilst dealing with clients' illness and suffering represents **emotional labour** (Hunter 2001; Riley and Weiss 2016)
- ▶ Emotional labour is a source of workplace stress in health care and can lead to **burnout**

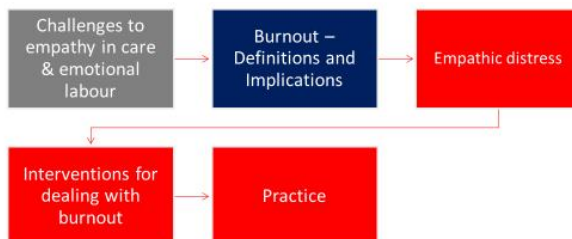
(Kerasidou and Horn 2016)



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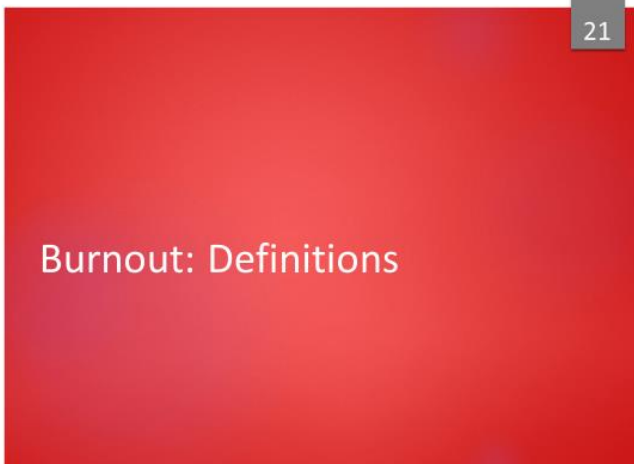
## Route Map

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- ▶ Burnout is a work-related stress syndrome resulting from chronic exposure to job stress.
- ▶ Healthcare professionals often experience caregiver burnout which is a common term for physical, mental and emotional stress





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## What is carer burnout?

- ▶ Burnout is characterized by
  1. emotional exhaustion
  2. depersonalization and
- 1. (Maslach et al., 2001)
- ▶ also described a low sense of personal accomplishment as **decline of engagement** with ones' job that happens **gradually over time**  
(Bakker and Costa, 2014)



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## Burnout - Implications

- ▶ Burnout has personal and interpersonal implications and affects health care
- ▶ personal implications:
  - overwhelming exhaustion and feelings of incompetence
- ▶ interpersonal implications:
  - cynicism and depersonalisation – **reduces empathy**  
(Maslach et al., 2001)
- ▶ Implications for care
  - Contributes to **poor outcomes**, including worse patient safety, and to lower patient satisfaction  
(Poghosyan, Clarke et al. 2010)



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## Burnout - Symptoms

25

- ▶ Physical symptoms
  - ▶ Fatigue
  - ▶ Sleep disturbances
  - ▶ Headaches
- ▶ Behavioural symptoms
  - ▶ Social retreat
  - ▶ Work avoidance
  - ▶ Substance use
- ▶ Emotional symptoms
  - ▶ Depression
  - ▶ Low self-esteem



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## Burnout – More examples

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- ▶ Negative outlook of work – dreading going to work
- ▶ Having low energy and fatigue at work
- ▶ Getting easily irritated by colleagues – Pulling away and avoiding them
- ▶ Blaming others for your mistakes
- ▶ Your work and contribution is not recognized
- ▶ You are thinking of quitting your job





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## Exercise: Assessment Of Burnout

► Assessment **using single item**: "I feel burned out from my work."

1. Never
  2. A few times a year or less
  3. Once a month or less
  4. A few times a month
  5. **Once a week**
  6. **A few times per week**
  7. **Every day**
- } *high burnout risk*
- (West, Dyrbye et al. 2012, 2009)



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## Individual Exercise: Checking Yourself For Risk Of Burnout

► Please perform

1) the single item assessment

and then

2) the *Burnout – Self Test* to get information about your burnout risk



Slide 29

## Stress versus burnout: what's the difference

29

- ▶ Stress is short-term and it is related to specific situations (e.g., deadline).
- ▶ Once stressful factors are removed, stress subsides.
- ▶ Burnout takes over a longer period of time. It is connected to a feeling that your work is meaningless.
- ▶ Burnout is a deep sense of disillusionment and hopelessness
- ▶ However, stress is the driving force behind burnout



Slide 30

## How To Seek Appropriate Help

30

- ▶ Health care professionals who suffer from burnout frequently delay seeking support
- (Putnik, de Jong et al. 2011)
- ▶ However, it is important **that you seek help before the burnout symptoms get worse:**
    - ▶ **Reach out** to co-workers, friends or loved ones - support and collaboration might help you cope.
    - ▶ Check if there are **employee assistance** programs or **counselling** services - take advantage of relevant services.





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## Research on burnout and empathy

(Narme, 2018)

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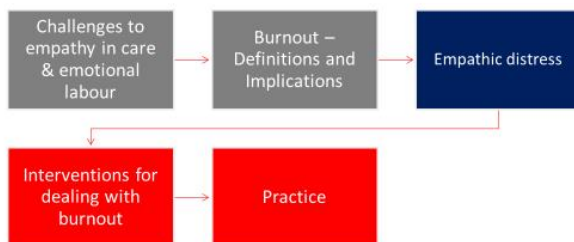
- ▶ **Objective:**
  - ▶ To understand the role of empathy towards burnout.
  - ▶ How can empathic skills and burnout can be affected by empathy-focused training?
- ▶ **Method:**
  - ▶ 124 nursing staff from 10 geriatric residential facilities. They filled out three questionnaires (Maslach and others) in cognitive (perspective taking) and emotional empathy (compassionate care)
  - ▶ 41 caregivers before and after an empathy-based training programme.
- ▶ **Results:** Burnout and personal distress decreased after the training. Nursing staff reported lower depersonalization and higher accomplishment.



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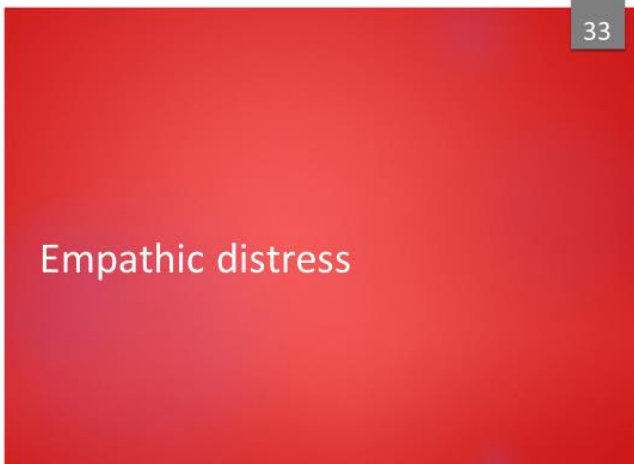
## Route Map

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- ▶ Empathy has both **affective (=emotional)** and **cognitive** components
- ▶ The affective component of empathy relates to sharing the emotions of the other person
  - ▶ This sharing of emotions, or **emotional contagion**, is an automatic response
  - ▶ Sharing emotions for the empathiser leads to feelings of **empathic concern, which is key for an empathic exchange**
  - ▶ However, if emotions are over aroused, **personal/empathic distress** can develop

(Decety and Hodges, 2006; Decety and Yoder 2016)



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## Empathic Distress

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- ▶ Strong aversive and **self-oriented response** to the suffering of others
- ▶ **Form of empathic overarousal** that results from **poor emotion regulation** and reduced distinction of the self from the other



(Decety and Lamm 2009; Dowling 2018; Wacker et al., 2016)



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## Empathic Distress

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- ▶ Empathic distress can lead to the **desire to withdraw** from a situation in order to protect one's self from excessive negative feelings

(Decety and Lamm 2009; Dowling 2018; Wacker et al., 2016)



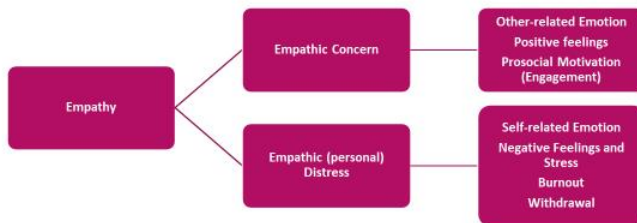




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## Effects Of Empathic Concern And Empathic Distress

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(figure adapted from Dowling, 2018)



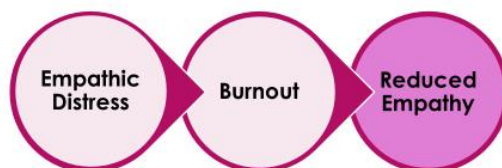
Empathic concern goes beyond simply understanding others and sharing their feelings: it actually moves us to take action, to help however we can.

Empathic distress, which leads to the desire to withdraw from the situation to protect oneself from too many negative emotions and being too upset. When we go into empathic distress, we withdraw.

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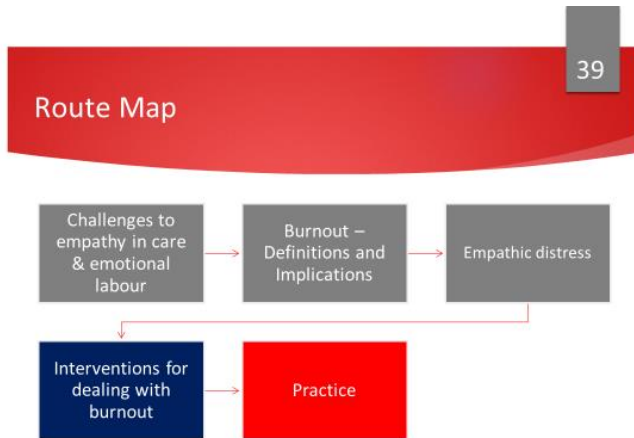
## Empathic Distress, Burnout And Empathy

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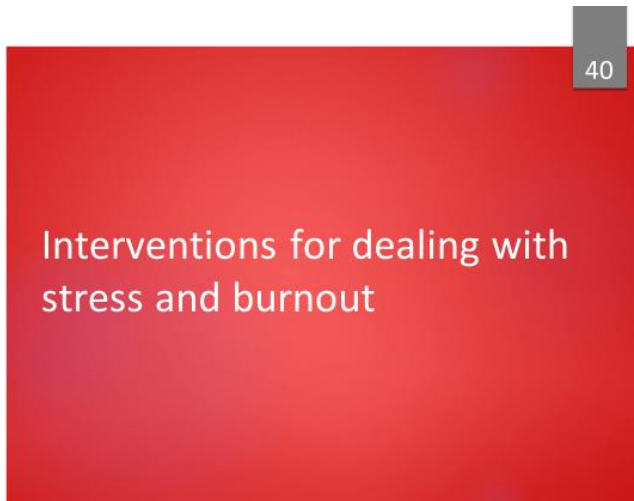




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Slide 40



Slide 41

## Techniques for coping with stress

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1. **Identify** what's causing stress
  - ▶ Look closely at your habits, attitude and excuses
  - ▶ Accept responsibility for creating it
2. **Replace unhealthy ways** of coping with healthy ones
  - ▶ No single methods for everyone
  - ▶ Focus on what makes you feel calm and in control
3. Practice the 4 A's of **stress management**
  - ▶ Avoid unnecessary stress
  - ▶ Alter the situation
  - ▶ Adapt to the stressor
  - ▶ Accept what you can't change



(Robinson et al, 2021)

Slide 42

## Techniques for coping with stress

42

4. **Get moving**
  - ▶ Physical activity is a huge stress reliever
  - ▶ Release of feel good hormones
5. Build **strong relationships**
  - ▶ Relationships stress buffers
  - ▶ Reach out to family or friends
6. **Walk away** when you are angry
  - ▶ Before reacting, regroup by counting to 10
  - ▶ Exercise increases endorphins – feel good hormones



(Robinson et al, 2021)

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## Techniques for coping with stress

6. Make time for **fun and relaxation**
  - ▶ Set aside leisure time
  - ▶ Do something you enjoy every day
  - ▶ Keep your sense of humour
7. **Rest your mind**
  - ▶ Reduce caffeine intake
  - ▶ Remove bright screen distractions
8. **Manage your time better**
  - ▶ Don't over-commit
  - ▶ Prioritise tasks
  - ▶ Give responsibility to others



(Robinson et al. 2021)

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## Reducing Empathic Distress Using Emotional Regulation

- ▶ Emotional regulation in health care refers to the **processes where someone manages emotions** during engagement with patients
  - ▶ also described as **self-awareness during empathic engagement** with patients (Tei, Becker et al. 2014)
  - ▶ strongly related to empathy (Thompson et al.,2019)
- ▶ Without the ability to regulate one's own emotions, excessive emotional empathy may lead to burnout (Zeidner, Hadar et al. 2013)
- ▶ **Emotional regulation training** has been found to be successful in reducing workplace stress and burnout in health care professionals

(Wellenmann, Schnyder et al. 2018; Kharatzadeh, Alavi et al. 2020)



Slide 45

## Individual Exercise: Can you regulate your emotions?

45

- ▶ Please fill in the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation **Scale Short Form (DERS-SF)** to get information about your emotion regulation skills
- ▶ Calculate total score by adding everything up
  - ▶ Higher scores suggest greater problems with emotion regulation
- ▶ Reflect: are you surprised by the result?



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## Emotion Regulation Through Cognitive Reappraisal

46

- ▶ **Cognitive reappraisal** involves thinking about a negative or challenging situation in a more **positive** way.
- ▶ Example: Imagine a friend did not return your calls or texts for several days. Rather than thinking that this reflected something about yourself, such as "my friend hates me," you might instead think, "my friend must be really busy."



Using cognitive reappraisal in everyday life is related to experiencing more positive and less negative emotions (McRae, Ciesielski et al. 2012)

Slide 47

## Group Exercise: Cognitive Reappraisal

47

- ▶ Please remember a situation at work that has caused you stress and negative thinking. Choose one occasion between you.
- ▶ Please work with the thoughts-feeling-behaviour worksheet
  - ▶ first describe the situation using your original interpretation
  - ▶ following this try to think of at least two different ways to reappraise the situation and describe them as required in the worksheet



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## Reducing Empathic Distress Using Mindfulness Interventions

48

- ▶ Mindfulness interventions have been found to have a **significant impact** on health care professional's level of burnout  
(Conversano, Ciacchini et al. 2020, van der Riet, Levett-Jones et al. 2018)
- ▶ Mindfulness meditation reduce stress, depression and anxiety in nurses and nursing students





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### Mindfulness exercise

Slide 50

50

### Individual Exercise: 4-7-8 Breathing (Relaxing Breath)

- ▶ Rationale: The focus on breathing helps to **reduce stress** (Varvogli & Darviri 2011)
- ▶ Technique: Adopt a **comfortable sitting position**
  - ▶ place the tip of the tongue on the tissue right behind the top front teeth
- ▶ Focus on the following breathing pattern
  - ▶ empty the lungs of air
  - ▶ breathe in quietly through the nose for **4** seconds
  - ▶ hold the breath for a count of **7** seconds
  - ▶ exhale forcefully through the mouth, pursing the lips and making a “whoosh” sound, for **8** seconds

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## Individual Exercise: Remaining Calm And Mindful During Stressful Situations

51

- ▶ Please think of an example when you or someone you observed had a calm and mindful approach during a stressful professional situation?
  - ▶ Describe the behavior that went with the calm and mindful approach
  - ▶ How did the environment react to this?
  - ▶ How did it make you feel?



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## Self-Care

52

- ▶ They are practices that individuals initiate and perform to maintain their life, health and wellbeing (World Health Organization,2018)
- ▶ Self-care practices can buffer workplace stress in health professionals (Nahm, Warren et al. 2012)
- ▶ Self care can be physical, psychological or spiritual
  - ▶ E.g. eating, sleeping, and moving well are achievable self care goals (Couser, Chesak et al. 2020)







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## Group Discussion: Self-care Strategies

53

- ▶ **Please pair up** with another learner and have an exchange about the following points:
- ▶ What are activities/ things you do to take care of yourself, e.g. after a stressful working day or week
- ▶ Have you observed other, e.g. your educators, friends, family, role – models practice self-caring?
- ▶ What does this look like?



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## Exercise: Goals For Self-Care In Daily Life

54

- ▶ In pairs of two, please discuss which self care measures you would like to incorporate in your daily life
- ▶ Create each a SMART goal (see below) for one of these self care measures.



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*Role play*

Stress in the work environment

Slide 56

Revision Questions

56

- ▶ What challenges our capacity for empathy in health care?
  - ▶ name two threats to empathy in health care?
- ▶ How is burnout defined and assessed?
- ▶ In what way can empathy lead to burnout in health care professionals?
  - ▶ which two components of empathy are relevant here?
- ▶ Please name two evidence based strategies to prevent burnout
  - ▶ describe one exercise for each strategy



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57

- Challenges to empathy in health care
- Definition and assessment of burnout
- Relationship between empathy and burnout
- Strategies to prevent burnout



Key Points

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- Challenges to empathy in health care
- Definition and assessment of burnout
- Relationship between empathy and burnout
- Strategies to prevent burnout



Key Points



## Slide 59

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THANK YOU





## 5.2. ROLE PLAYS

### 5.3.1. ROLE PLAY 1: SCENARIO 17: CARER WITH BURNOUT

**Scenario Number:** 10

**Role play Title:** Carer with burnout

**Discipline:** VET

**Developed by:** MMC

**Work areas:** 3.2 Challenges to empathy in caregiving and how to overcome these

**Specific features:** Dealing with stress and burnout at work.

**Scenario description:** A carer is stressed because of the workload and other issues that arise at the nursing home where he works, such as problems in his relationship with colleagues, difficult patients, lack of understanding from the management. Lately, he has been taking days off, giving as a justification health problems. The manager of the nursing home is worried, because he cannot afford having less employees, so he decides to talk to the carer to find out what the matter is.

## 5.3. EXERCISES

### 5.4.1. EXERCISE 1: ASSESSMENT OF BURNOUT (SLIDE 27)

Ask trainees to answer the questionnaire in slide 27 and 28.

**Duration:** 15 minutes

### 5.4.2. EXERCISE 2: INDIVIDUAL EXERCISE: BREATHING (SLIDE 49-50)

Ask the trainees to watch the video and perform the breathing exercises.

**Duration:** 20 minutes

### 5.4.3. EXERCISE 3: GROUP DISCUSSION REMAINING CALM AND MINDFUL DURING STRESSFUL SITUATIONS (SLIDE 51)

Ask the trainees to discuss the questions.

## ACTIVITY IO7A2: DEVELOPMENT OF THE TUTOR GUIDE



- Please think of an example when you or someone you observed had a calm and mindful approach during a stressful professional situation
- Describe the behavior that went with the calm and mindful approach
- How did the environment react to this?
- How did it make you feel?

**Duration:** 15 minutes

#### 5.4.4. EXERCISE 4: SMART GOALS FOR SELF-CARE IN DAILY LIFE (SLIDE 54)

In pairs of two, please discuss which self-care measures you would like to incorporate in your daily life. Create a SMART goal (see below) for one of these self-care measures.

