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# Transcending Burnout & Beyond...



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## Presenter Background

- **Dr. Alistair Ross.**
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- La Trobe Rural Health School
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- Mental health Nurse: 28 years.
- Community Mental Health Nurse (CAT / ECAT Team) for 14 years.
- Masters in Burnout in Community Mental Health Nurses.
- PhD in Transcending (overcoming) Burnout in Community Mental Health Nurses.

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## Session Overview

- In today's session we are going to discuss:
- What is Burnout and How do we Relate to Burnout? Checking in on the Theory.
- What does Burnout actually look / feel like?
  - Detecting the signs of Burnout in Others.
  - Reflecting on the signs of Burnout in yourself.
- Explore the notion of *transcending* as a pathway for overcoming burnout.
- Examine a pathway for transcending burnout.
- Discuss some practical strategies you can utilise to help yourself, and those around you, in managing the risk of burnout in your practice.

## Burnout and Mental Health Nurses

- Mental Health Nurses are faced with a difficult set of factors that make for a increasingly challenging working environment:
  - Increasingly challenging / high acuity / complex consumers.
  - Consumer reluctance / ambivalence about engaging in treatment.
  - High levels of consumer relapse / 'revolving door' syndrome.
  - Increasing workload (both in terms of volume and complexity).
  - Limited resources / increasing demands.
  - Healthcare politics.
  - Tedious and time consuming documentation / paper work.
  - Professional stigma / low prestige.
  - Negative community attitudes towards MH consumers (and the people who work with them).

## What does Burnout Mean to You?

- Before we do a quick run through the theory around the concept of burnout it is probably useful to start with a quick (honest) reflection on your own personal construct of the phenomena of 'burnout':
  - *What does the term 'burnout' mean to you?*
  - *When you hear the word what (or who) comes to mind.*
  - *What do you think causes burnout?*
  - *Have you ever experienced burnout?*
  - *Have you ever worked with a colleague who is experiencing burnout?*
  - *Do you currently work with a colleague who is experiencing burnout?*
  - *What is the culture surrounding burnout like where you work?*
  - *What is the source of all these ideas? (and how much rationality / irrationality underpins this?).*

## What does the Theory say about *Burnout*?

- Burnout is a psychological phenomenon that can happen to anyone.
- It occurs as a consequence of working with people which requires that we utilise a great deal of our 'self' in the caring process.
- Professional burnout is generally described as prolonged stress that impairs one's ability to perform his or her job in demanding situations.
- Risk factors for nursing burnout include:
  - Practice environment [workload / acuity].
  - Compassion fatigue.
  - An imbalance between family, life and career.
  - Sickness / absence.
  - Loss of confidence.
  - A sense of disconnection.

## What does the Theory say about *Burnout*?

- The **Maslach Burnout Inventory** (1978) is the most widely respected / utilised scale for measuring Burnout in healthcare professionals. It measures burnout in terms of:
  - **Emotional Exhaustion:** measures feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work
  - **Depersonalization:** measures an unfeeling and impersonal response toward recipients of one's service, care treatment, or instruction.
  - **Reduced Personal Accomplishment:** measures feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work

## What does the Theory say about *Burnout*?

- **Emotional Exhaustion:** measures feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work:
- It is characterised by:
  - Emotion fatigue.
  - Physical fatigue.
  - Feeling psychologically and emotionally drained.
  - Nothing left to give.
  - Inadequate personal resources to deal with work.

## What does the Theory say about *Burnout*?

- **Depersonalization:** measures an unfeeling and impersonal response toward recipients of one's service, care treatment, or instruction.
- It is characterised by:
  - A tendency to dehumanise consumers.
  - Referring to consumers by their diagnosis / location.
  - Seeing all consumers as the same.
  - Generalising / basing decisions on assumptions rather than specifics.
  - Seeing the illness rather than the person.

## What does the Theory say about *Burnout*?

- **Reduced Personal Accomplishment:** measures feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work:
- It is characterised by:
  - Lost sense of value in one's work.
  - Feeling overwhelmed by 'the system'.
  - Feeling like what you do makes no difference [disempowerment].
  - Feelings of despair / hopelessness / helplessness toward the issues in the 'system'.

## What does Burnout actually look like?

- How do we detect the signs of Burnout in Others.
  - What are the signs we see in the people around us?
  - Words like negative, cynical, sarcastic, pessimistic and perpetually angry come to mind.
  - Consider the classical image of the burnt out old nurse...
  - Often a lot easier in to see in others ... though often hard to raise.
- How do we detect the signs of Burnout in Yourself.
  - Consider the classical criteria put forward by Maslach & Jackson.
  - Often much harder to detect in yourself.
  - Why? Innate resistance, suggestion of weakness, questions competence...

## What does Burnout actually *Feel* like?

<b>Work Performance:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Declining / inconsistent performance.</li> <li>- Loss of enthusiasm.</li> <li>- Accidents / uncharacteristic mistakes.</li> <li>- Increased time at work.</li> <li>- Lack of holiday planning / leave requests.</li> <li>- Indecision.</li> <li>- Memory lapses.</li> <li>- Criticism of others.</li> <li>- Lack of cooperation with others.</li> </ul>	<b>Physical Symptoms:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nervousness when speaking.</li> <li>- Sweating.</li> <li>- Tiredness / lethargy.</li> <li>- Frequent headaches.</li> <li>- Hand tremors.</li> <li>- Rapid Weight loss or gain.</li> <li>- Stomach upsets.</li> <li>- Lack of interest in appearance/ hygiene.</li> <li>- Increased alcohol / substance use.</li> </ul>
<b>Withdrawal behaviours:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Resistance to giving support to colleagues.</li> <li>- Arriving late / leaving early.</li> <li>- Extended breaks.</li> <li>- Increased absenteeism.</li> <li>- Reduced Social interaction.</li> </ul>	<b>Emotional Reactions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Irritability / moodiness.</li> <li>- Over reactions to issues.</li> <li>- Uncharacteristic mood swings.</li> <li>- Decreased emotional regulation.</li> <li>- Episodes of extreme emotion (crying / temper).</li> <li>- Increased irritability or agitation.</li> </ul>

## Why does this Matter to You?

- Because all of this means **you** are at significant risk of experiencing Burnout during your career:
  - It is a very real problem.
  - It is subtle, insidious and potentially devastating.
  - It can happen to all of us; no one is immune (seriously; no one!).
  - It's most commonly noticed only in hindsight.
  - Easily to see in others; much more difficult to see in ones self.
  - Most nurses who suffer with burnout describe being blindsided by the experience.

## Why does this Matter to You?

- Having accepted that experiencing significant burnout it is critical to:
- **Acknowledge this**; it doesn't make you any less of a MH nurse, nor does it mean the care you're providing to your consumers is any less.
- It is important to engage with and critique what the experience of burnout is for you:
  - Identity what it actually is in terms of the way it affects your feelings, thoughts, behaviours/actions and relationships (personal and professional).
  - Equally, identify areas that remain unaffected; this is essential to maintaining a balanced and accurate understanding of what burnout is in your life.
- This sets up the foundations for you to consider pathways to transcend your experience of Burnout.

## The Notion of Transcending.

- Derived from the Latin *transcendere*, the word transcend is defined as to; 'be beyond the range of or domain or grasp of (human experience, reason, belief, etc.); excel, surpass'
  - (Australian Macquarie Dictionary 5th Ed (2009) p.667).
- It reflected the qualities of the human experience being described in that it encompassed the idea of **surpassing** (the **domain or grasp**) of **the human experience** (of burnout).
- A **phenomenon** that **enables a person** to **extend (grow) personal boundaries**, and in doing so enhances one's feeling of self worth.

## The Notion of Transcending.

- The qualities of transcending are best captured by Kvigne & Kirkevold (2002) who state:
- Transcendence captures the idea that people are **directed beyond themselves towards something else, something more**, by their **intentional consciousness**.
- They have **an urge to go beyond** what is given, i.e. the circumstances that they find themselves in.
- Transcendence finds **expression** in **actions and projects** with a **clear content and target**.
- Transcendence is not the same as developmental changes related to growth. It requires **conscious and purposeful action** performed by **a conscious, creative human subject** (Kvigne & Kirkevold, 2002, p.81).



## The Notion of Transcending.

- So therefore, to Transcend adversity (burnout) involves the individual;
- Engaging in an **active** (rather than passive) **process**.
- Making considered and deliberate decisions to move towards something more beyond the current state. It is more than just survival or innate resilience; it is **considered personal choice and action** leading to change.
- Possessing **a commitment toward** /a belief in there being **a better situation** than the one in which they find themselves even when this is not evident or visible.
- **Trusting in their own ability to engage** with the situation and themselves to create motion towards a better circumstance.
- Engaging in **clear and deliberate actions / behaviours / strategies** designed to accomplish clearly defined goals.



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## Transcending Burnout in Action.

- **1: Transcending Burnout through Personal Strength: Grim Determination, Pragmatism and Optimism involves:**
  - Being able to know and **tap into** your own **strengths** and **capacity to endure**.
  - Allowing yourself to be **guided** by your own **pragmatic needs** or **values**.
  - **Drawing heavily** upon your **inherent intrapersonal qualities**.



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## Transcending Burnout in Action.

- **2: Transcending Burnout through Reaching for Support involves:**
  - being able to **interact** and **converse** with others about how you are feeling [primarily colleagues].
  - being able to feel **both safe** and able to **reveal your feelings of uncertainty, vulnerability and your loss of confidence.**
  - **reaching for support** from colleagues within your team, through supervision or informally through your collegial networks of MH nurses.
  - Developing / maintaining the sense of **feeling understood** and of **not being alone** as the essential element.

## Transcending Burnout in Action.

- **3: Transcending Burnout through Weathering the Storm involves:**
  - **persisting** and **pushing on** through difficulty and adversity and moving forward.
  - **accepting** this as being an integral element in transcending burnout.
  - **constructing** and **maintaining a hypothetical escape hatch** providing a feeling of choice.
  - **remaining** and **persisting because you want to**, not because you have to.
  - understanding your experience of moving past and beyond will most likely **ebb and flow**.

## Transcending Burnout in Action.

- **4: Transcending Burnout through Making Sense of the Personal Non-Sense and Re-Finding Clinical Meaning involves:**
  - developing an increasing intrapersonal understanding of the situation.
  - making sense of **your abilities and limitations** as mental health nurses experiencing / having experienced burnout.
  - reflecting upon your practice and 'reconstructing' this again understand your experiences.
  - being able to reconnect with your **sense of clinical meaning** and the value of your clinical practice.

## Transcending Burnout in Action.

- **5: Transcending Burnout through Regaining Balance and Lost Control involves:**
  - being able to recognise and understand your **loss of control and balance**.
  - being able to rationalise your surroundings to allow you to make decisions about the **scope and limitations** of your practice.
  - And subsequently being able to reassume control in practical behaviours that will have the resultant effect of returning your life to a **more balanced state**.

## Transcending Burnout in Action.

- **6: Transcending Burnout through connection with the World Outside involves:**
  - being able to **reconnect** with your **life outside of work** as a counter-weight to burnout.
  - **spending time** with close friends and family for simple enjoyment and to unload negative emotions.
  - engaging with the world outside as offering opportunities for **simple distraction** and the chance to think about something else.
  - engaging in self-caring and self-soothing activities.

## Transcending Burnout in Action.

- **7: Transcending Burnout through Rebuilding the Boundaries / Setting and Affirming Realistic Expectations involves:**
  - repairing and rebuilding your boundaries based upon **realistic self-expectation**.
  - accepting the **limits of your own practice**, separating the ideal from the actual and accepting limitations.
  - setting limits on yourself, and being willing to disseminate the responsibility for consumer care.
  - ensuring the personal boundary between work life and home / personal life was kept in good repair.

## Transcending Burnout in Action.

- **8: Transcending Burnout as the Road Goes Ever On involves:**
  - Acknowledging the idea that whilst you have transcended your recent experience of burnout **there may be further episodes** emerge for you in the future.
  - **calmly accepting** the possibility of future episodes of burnout.
  - **describing a clear sense of growth** and broader understanding of themselves and your feelings related to transcending (burnout).
  - **re-finding** aspects of yourself that you previously thought lost.
  - developing **new strengths and resources** that you are able to identify as being important in your working life moving into the future; this is the **rainbow at the end of the storm**.

## Practical Stuff: what can the Team Do?

- A Team-wide approach to addressing the risk of Burnout is going to go a long way towards promoting collegiality and increasing a sense of support:
  - **Identify** and **name** the biggest issues facing you all as a team (this draws on collective experience and promotes ownership).
  - **Identify** things that **do work** and **don't work** (and why) in terms of team practice.
  - **Name** and **challenge** clearly 'silly' things in team culture / practice.
  - Clarify **essential workload** verses **desirable workload**.
  - Acknowledge this issue and risk that faces all of you; **de-stigmatise burnout** in your team.
  - Make time to **check in on each other** and see how you're doing.
  - Be willing to undertake 'courageous' **conversations about burnout**.

## Practical Stuff: what can YOU Do?

- **Seek Support to manage the Stress:**
  - Seeking informal support is often the first step though think about how to frame this conversation:
    - *This place is so terrible that I'm completely stressed out (less helpful).*
    - *I'm finding things really stressful and I'm not sure how to cope (more helpful).*
  - The person you talk to doesn't have to be able to "fix" your stressors; they just have to listen attentively without being distracted or judging you [this goes both ways].
  - Opening up is often anxiety provoking, however most colleagues / friends / family will appreciate that you trust them enough to confide in them, and respond in a manner that echo's this trust

## Practical Stuff: what can YOU Do?

- **Revisit and re-evaluate Boundaries [personal and professional]:**
  - Set boundaries both at work and relating to work / home life.
    - Work stays at work / home stays at home.
    - Ensure that you shake off your work place stress before you get home.
  - Set boundaries on electronic communication (i.e. no work email attached to your personal computer / phone).
  - Don't give up valued home life activities because you need to 'work'.
  - Don't bring any work home with you.
  - Notice and respond effectively to any work creeping in to home.

## Practical Stuff: what can YOU Do?

- **Actively engage in Activities that promote relaxation and reduce stress:**
  - Nourish your creative side. Creativity is a powerful antidote to burnout. Try something new, start a fun project, or resume a favourite hobby. Choose activities that have nothing to do with work.
  - Set aside relaxation time. Relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, and deep breathing activate the body's relaxation response, a state of restfulness that is the opposite of the stress response.
  - Get plenty of sleep. Feeling tired can exacerbate burnout by causing you to think irrationally. Keep your cool in stressful situations by getting a good night's sleep.

## Practical Stuff: what can YOU Do?

- **Re-Frame how you look at Work:**
  - Seek to find some value in everything you do. Even in some mundane jobs, you can often focus on how what you do helps others, for example, or provides a much needed product or service.
  - Look for opportunities to focus on different aspects of your work; find a new portfolio or role within the team that can challenge and invigorate you.
  - Focus on aspects of the job that you do enjoy—even if it's just chatting with your co-workers at lunch. Changing your attitude towards your job can help you regain a sense of purpose and control (*I have to* vs. *I get to...*).
  - Invest in the relationships at work. Having positive relationships with colleagues to chat and joke with during the day can help relieve stress from an unfulfilling or demanding job, improve your job performance, or simply get you through a rough day.

## Practical Stuff: what can YOU Do?

- Develop a **Realistic Understanding** of the reality of your working environment along with an acceptance of what you can and can't change:
  - Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems. You can't change the fact that highly stressful events happen, but you can change how you interpret and respond to these events.
  - Accept that adversity and change are an integral part of practice as a MH nurse (and life in general for that matter). Certain goals may no longer be attainable as a result of adverse situations.
  - Accepting circumstances that cannot be changed can help you focus on circumstances that you can alter.

## Practical Stuff: what can YOU Do?

- Set, work towards and achieve **Personal Goals** to change the things you can:
  - Take control of your career: develop some realistic goals. Do something regularly – even if it seems like a small accomplishment – that enables you to move toward your goals.
  - Instead of focusing on tasks that seem unachievable, ask yourself, "What's one thing I know I can accomplish today that helps me move in the direction I want to go?"
  - Take decisive actions. Act on adverse situations as much as you can. Take any action that is available to you, rather than detaching completely from problems and stresses and wishing they would just go away.
  - Look for opportunities for self-discovery. People often learn something about themselves and may find that they have grown in some respect as a result of their struggle with adversity.



## Practical Stuff: what can YOU Do?

- **Maintain a Positive View of yourself at Work:**
  - Nurture a positive view of yourself. Developing confidence in your ability to solve problems and trusting your instincts helps build resilience.
  - Keep things in perspective. Even when facing very painful events, try to consider the stressful situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. Avoid blowing the event out of proportion.
  - Maintain a hopeful outlook. An optimistic outlook enables you to expect that good things will happen in your life. Try visualising what you want, rather than worrying about what you fear.
  - Take care of yourself. Pay attention to and be Mindful of your own needs and feelings.

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Any Questions?



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