



St George Hospital

Two Minute Guide to Self Care

Looking After Yourself

Oncology can be very emotionally demanding as well as rewarding; and many staff nominate this as one of the biggest challenges.

There are a few points worth remembering:

Death is not failure

Many of us instinctively feel that if the patient dies we have failed. This does not make sense when dealing with incurable illness.

What we should take satisfaction from is the quality of the care we provide and the difference we make. This is what makes oncology so rewarding - we make a big difference.

If you are upset - it's because you care

It is OK to be upset if a patient is dying or dies. The loss we feel is the result of the fact that we care, it's a consequence of us being human not machines. The alternative is not caring or not feeling- and that is not much of an alternative.

Share the burden

Debriefing with others is an important way of dealing with the emotional stress of oncology. Other staff medical and non medical who know the situation will usually understand how you feel or be feeling the same themselves.

Maximising personal support from outside of the hospital is also important.

Have a life outside the hospital

Having a life outside of work is important for all of us but times of emotional stress make it more important.

- Exercise
- Develop a passion for something else
- Keep up with friends
- Plan holidays ahead
- Don't use alcohol as a drug

These are all common sense but medical training undermines most of these things and now is a good time to develop habits for sustainable practice.

Don't be afraid to seek help

If things are getting difficult don't be afraid to ask for help. Look out for signs of depression or burnout.

Your GP is a good person to talk too if you want an independent and confidential talk about emotional health. Otherwise there is an Employee Assistance Program available for all staff.

You should also let your supervisor know if you are experiencing difficulties.

Further Resources

For more details see the fact sheets on health professional burnout from End of Life/Palliative Education Resource Centre (EPERC) 2007:

- [Professional Burnout-Part 1.pdf](#)
- [Professional Burnout-Part 2.pdf](#)
- [Professional Burnout-Part 3.pdf](#)
- [Professional Burnout-Part 4.pdf](#)