Organizational Self-Care:

Addressing the Collective Responsibility for Your Employees' Wellbeing

"Success is liking yourself, liking what you do, and liking how you do it."

- Maya Angelou

Health Centers have a crucial role in the provision of high-quality, comprehensive healthcare and in advancing health equity in medically underserved communities.

In order to continue delivering quality services that meet the needs of communities, it is critical that Health Centers invest in the satisfaction and wellbeing of their staff. In 2017, HOP created a self-care resource titled "Self-Care: Taking Care of Ourselves So We Can Take Care of Others," to share self-care practices, benefits, and strategies to build a culture of self-care so that Health Centers can recruit, motivate, support, and retain staff. This resource builds on those strategies and focuses on how Health Center organizations can build organizational practices that can foster a work environment that supports staff satisfaction and retention.

Challenges facing Health Center staff

Health Center staff play many roles —from advocate, educator, and coordinator to service provider—which can be challenging and overwhelming.

People in these roles may experience compassion fatigue and/or burnout as a result of the responsibilities and emotional demands of the job. Compassion fatigue is a condition characterized by the gradual lessening of compassion over time due to the ongoing stress of care and giving from work performed on a regular basis,[1] whereas burnout can be characterized as a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress.[2] Compassion fatigue and

burnout are widespread among people who work in helping professions, including Health Centers.[3] The prevalence of burnout among physicians, nurses, and Health Center workers has been well documented.[4-6]
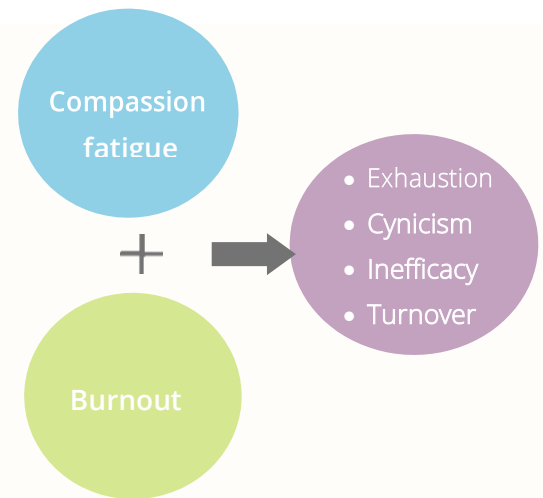
Compassion fatigue and burnout are two distinct things but they can happen at the same time. Compassion fatigue and burnout can have a serious impact on the individual including depression and anxiety,[7] physical health problems,[8-9] and on the organization including staff retention and performance, reduced job satisfaction,[10] and morale of employees.[11]

Given potential impacts of compassion fatigue and burnout on staff, it is important for Health Center organizations to foster a culture of self-care through organizational practices and policies that will support their staff and empower them to do their best work in the community.

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The impact of compassion fatigue and burnout

Survey Overview: In 2021, HOP conducted an assessment to better understand how compassion fatigue and burnout impacted Health Center employees. We received responses from 22 Health Center employees of which half were from Health Centers that served migrant and seasonal agricultural workers and were in non-clinical roles. The results from our survey highlight the need for Health Centers to adopt organizational self-care practices that address compassion fatigue and burnout.
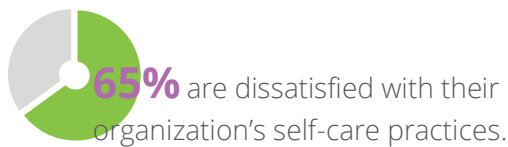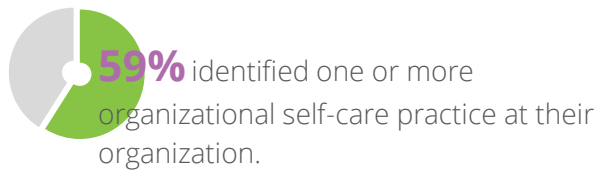
In the past 12 months:

73% of employees experienced one or more symptoms of compassion fatigue.

100% of managers reported that their employees experienced compassion fatigue at least sometimes.

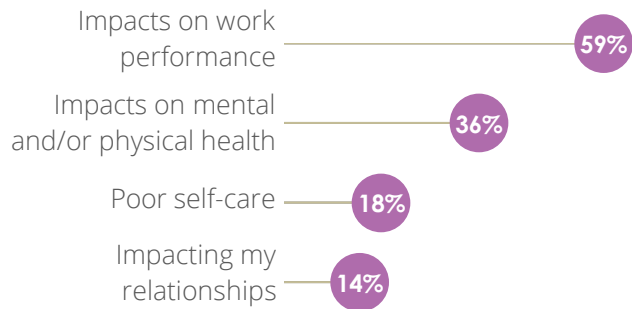**76%** of employees experienced one or more symptoms of burnout.

91% of managers reported that their employees experienced burnout at least sometimes.

59% identified one or more organizational self-care practice at their organization.

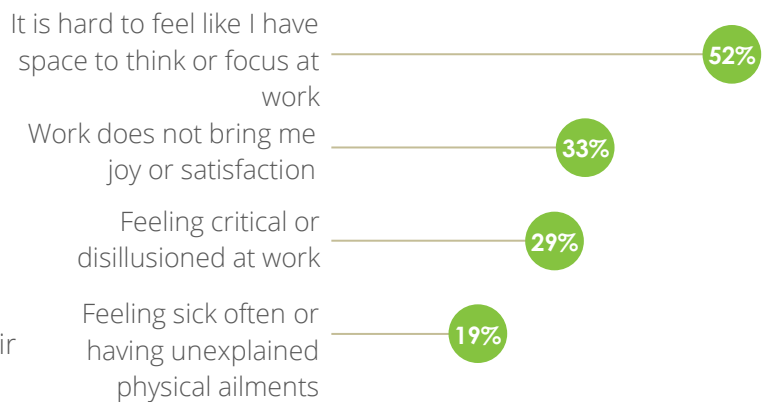**65%** are dissatisfied with their organization's self-care practices.

1 in 3 reported having left or thinking about leaving their organization because of compassion fatigue or burnout.

Practices employees would like to see implemented in their organization to create a more supportive and healthier work environment:

Signs and symptoms of compassion fatigue experienced

Impacts on work performance — **59%**

Impacts on mental and/or physical health — **36%**

Poor self-care — **18%**

Impacting my relationships — **14%**

Signs and symptoms of burnout experienced

It is hard to feel like I have space to think or focus at work — **52%**

Work does not bring me joy or satisfaction — **33%**

Feeling critical or disillusioned at work — **29%**

Feeling sick often or having unexplained physical ailments — **19%**

"More reasonable work load."

"More paid mental health days."

"Set aside time for relaxing/fun together."

"More transparency about supports available for burnout, compensation, and upward mobility within the organization. More wellness activities and access to them would be appreciated."

"More wellness breaks, self-care groups."

"Training for management."

"More time off, checking in on workers' health and wellness, addressing the state of the world and its impact on our ability to be productive."

"I believe the existing practices are great, I would like for them to be more uniformly implemented across the different departments."

What is organizational self-care?

Organizational self-care is an approach that moves beyond self-care as an individual practice to accepting it as a collective responsibility. In this collective practice, organizational leadership in partnership with team members develop policies and procedures that create a healthy work environment for all. By moving away from self-care as an individual practice, organizations create systems of support that build self-efficacy for employees to engage in self-care practices. These systems of support can address work performance, employee absences, staff turnover, and the overall growth of the organization. It is a collective responsibility that needs both teamwork and organizational buy-in and support to be effective. Organizational self-care is an important strategy to help Health Centers build resilience, address staffing challenges, provide needed support to staff, and retain a healthy workforce to ensure continuity and quality of care for their patients and communities.

Types of Self-Care[17]

- **Physical**: Getting enough sleep, drinking water, and/or moving your body
- **Intellectual**: Trying a new recipe, watching a movie, or reading a book
- **Professional**: Project management, building partnerships, and having a healthy work life balance
- **Financial**: Creating and sticking to a budget, putting money into saving
- **Spiritual**: Hobbies, practicing mindfulness
- **Social**: Having a social support system, feelings of belonging, and having healthy boundaries
- **Environmental**: Having a cozy blanket, natural light
- **Emotional**: Being able to let your guard down and decompress from stress

Examples of Organizational Self-Care Practices

- Develop a collective self-care commitment that includes input from staff and leadership
- Post the Health Center's self-care statement in visible areas and provide a copy to each employee
- Integrate questions about self-care as part of regular meetings, such as doing a check-in at the start of meetings
- Model self-care, especially by leadership, to set norms and encourage healthy practices(.e., not sending or responding to email after work hours, initiating breaks)
- Brainstorm ideas collectively as a staff on how to integrate self-care practices throughout the work day, such as group wellness breaks
- Create staff self-care pledges to keep as a form of self-care accountability
- Avoid or minimize setting back-to-back meetings
- Provide trainings for management and supervisors on assessing and addressing burnout and stress for their employees
- Support health practices by seeking organizational discounts for gyms or wellness centers

What are the benefits of organizational self-care?

As healthcare organizations whose missions are to improve the lives of others, the focus is often on patient-centered practices. To be healing-centered is to intentionally center not only the well-being of patients but also of the workers themselves.

Staff health and satisfaction are foundational for Health Centers to continue their important role in serving the community. Joy in work has gained recognition as the 4th aim in what is known as the triple aim of health care.[12] Adopting organizational self-care practices can have a positive impact in helping organizations meet their values-based mission. Employees can feel supported, valued, attain joy in the work and ready to serve their communities.

Adopting and implementing organizational practices of self-care can have several benefits, including:

Employee wellbeing and satisfaction
- Prevent or ameliorate work stresses
- Reduce burnout and compassion fatigue
- Promote job satisfaction and work-life balance
- Improve employee morale

Organizational effectiveness
- Decrease impacts of vacancies
- Increase retention of staff
- Improve employees' productivity
- Create a culture of quality performance and team collaboration

Quality of care
- High-quality provision of services
- Reduced mistakes
- Increase patient satisfaction

Financial benefits
- Decrease costs associated with turnover
- Maintain or increase revenue from services

A commitment to organizational self-care practices demonstrates an explicit recognition and respect for the workforce and can be a reflection of your organizational values. Aligning self-care principles with a Health Center's attitudes, practices, and policies can help to create an organizational culture of quality performance, job satisfaction, and team collaboration.

The community and outreach workforce and culturally responsive providers are critical to ensuring health access and quality of care. For example, Health Center workers and outreach and enrollment workers (staff in non-clinical roles), may have deep ties in the communities they serve. In these roles, they act as social and cultural mediators with the community and are instrumental for cultivating strong relationships and establishing trust. Through well-established organizational self-care practices, Health Centers can help staff in these roles address the stressors involved in their work and help them function more effectively.

Case Study: COVID-19 and Health Centers

Long standing challenges facing Health Center staff have been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic as Health Centers have taken up the critical role of providing services like testing, vaccination, and food distribution for groups disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, Health Centers are facing new challenges such as taking on additional roles, staff shortages, innovative approaches to outreach, and maintaining patient engagement virtually. These challenges add to the strain on Health Center staff who are also facing their own individual challenges as they navigate working as essential workers during a pandemic. The role of essential workers during this pandemic has been given new light as the demand grows for their capacity to meet the needs of the communities they serve.

As Health Centers pivoted operations to respond to the crisis of the pandemic, many sudden changes were made to organizational practices. The pandemic has transformed how teams work with each other through virtual, in person, or hybrid arrangements while also focused on continuing to deliver high quality care and services.
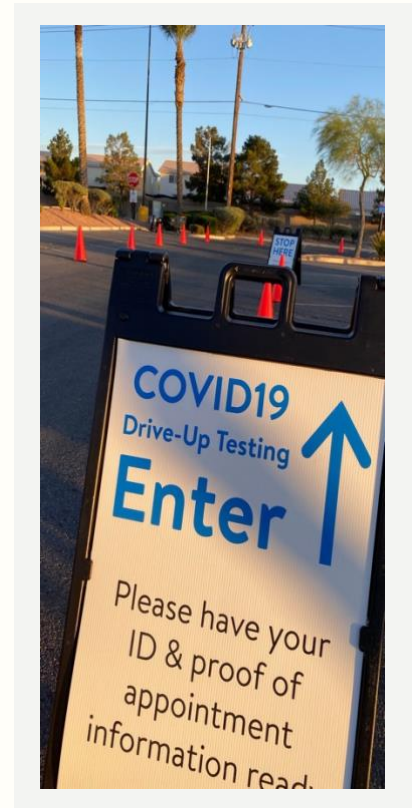
Reflect on your organization's response with the following questions:

- How did your organization respond to COVID-19 and the needs of your employees?
- What practices were in place that helped your team through the crisis?
- What practices will help your organization create or maintain a culture of self-care during and after the COVID-19 pandemic?
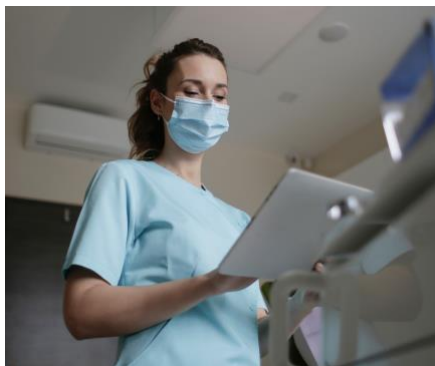
Building a practice of self-care at your organization
4 Steps to starting a collective self-care program

When addressing self-care in your organization, it is important to be realistic about the process. Organizational change will not happen overnight and more importantly, leading by example can help establish norms and move efforts forward. Here are some steps you can take to begin building a practice of self-care for your organization:

01 Conduct an internal assessment surrounding self-care policies and practices at your organization[13]

The first step to any process is to understand the scope of the problem. This is achieved by asking those you want to serve both about what is working well and also what opportunities for growth exist. In addition, it is important to include feedback at all levels of your organization which includes board members, leadership, and staff. This can be done through surveys, focus groups, and interviews. What are your current employment policies and do those policies support the value of self-care? Do the policies match the practices of the people in leadership?

02 Evaluate the data

Analyze the data you gathered from your assessment and identify any themes that stand out from the qualitative responses. It is important to identify strengths and weaknesses as you analyze the assessment so that you can develop strategies that meet the specific needs of your organization.

03 Disseminate the assessment results

Share the results of the assessment with your staff and invite folks into the process of identifying what areas of improvement to prioritize. This invites your staff to have buy in when it comes to implementation.

04 Develop an implementation plan

Create an implementation plan based on the analysis of your assessment. An implementation plan should have a clear goal and objectives that will help meet your goal. It is important to identify what you are trying to measure by achieving this goal. Are you trying to reduce staff burnout or compassion fatigue? Are you trying to increase staff retention? This plan should have a timeline that feels realistic (something that is achievable within a year) and identify who is responsible for leading this plan. This would be a good opportunity to develop a self-care committee consisting of both leadership and staff who will direct the implementation of addressing self-care at your organization.

Frameworks to help guide your implementation process

These are strategies that can help organizations start their journey of creating a sustainable and equitablepractice of self-care. To begin implementing a culture of self-care, be intentional about the following areas:

<u>Have an intersectional lens</u>[14] when addressing areas of improvement. It is important to note the unique challenges Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) staff may be experiencing. Some unique challenges include race-based stress experienced by BIPOC. Equally important is the dualism of the intersection of race and other identities such as gender, sexual orientation, ability status, etc. Does your organization routinely engage in assessing its culture and climate? Does your organization actively value employees who act as cultural mediators through acknowledgement and praise, professional opportunities, and financial compensation? Does your organization have clear and measurable goals related to antiracism and reducing racial disparities inthe workplace? Are there policies to address the ways women, non-able bodied, and LGBTQ+, and other underrepresented identities are included in the decision-making process at your organization?
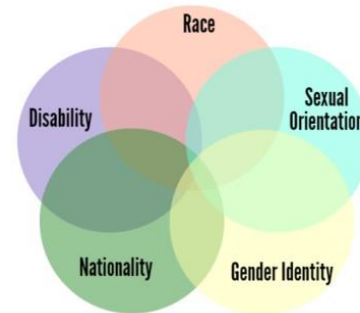

Image Credit: YW Boston Blog. (2017). What is intersectionality, and what does it have to do with me?

<u>Use a Healing Centered Engagement (HCE) framework</u> which is an expansion of trauma-informed care.[15,16] A trauma-informed care approach acknowledges that everyone has experienced some form of trauma and emphasizes that healing practices should be developed using the core practices of trauma-informed care. A healing- centered engagement framework, supports providers in their own healing. To be healing-centered is to intentionally center not only the well-being of patients but also of the workers themselves. Offer training for your staff that focuses on a strengths-based approach to addressing trauma. What is right with you? What is right in your community? Do you have policies for your employees to access mental health resources? Does your organization have clear and measurable goals related to antiracism and reducing racial disparities in the workplace?

<u>Leverage partnerships</u> both internally and externally when developing an implementation plan. Internal partnerships may be able to help you plan and help take ownership of the project. External partners are not affiliated with your organization but have resources, skills and knowledge to help you plan and implement your project. Partnerships can offer strengths that your organization does not have. Leveraging partnerships creates space for interdependence which moves away from individualism. A strength from one organization may be a weakness in another organization. Do your research and identify partners whose values align with yours, and partners who have a long track record of offering the kind of support you need. Who are some of the leaders in your community around self-care? Do you have a relationship with someone who does work around self-care? If you are in leadership, do you know folks who are leaders in other organizations who can act as a soundingboard for you and/or share what they have done in their organizations?

Organizational Self-Care Resources

The purpose of this resource is to support Health Center organizations in their journey toward equitable organizational self-care practices in order to foster a work environment that supports staff satisfaction and retention. However, there is no one way to practice self-care, each Health Center has unique strengths and challenges and should utilize the strategies that best serve their needs. The resources below were compiled as a starting point for Health Centers to implement or build on their organizational self-care practices.

Innovative Practices

Self Care Only Exists With Collective Care

> This is a blog of one organization's approach to organizational self -care which takes collective responsibility to provide employees with extended leave to practice self-care.

Implementation Strategies

The Journey Toward a Healing Organization: 10 Steps to Transform a Traumatizing Workplace

> An article, written by the Center for Care Innovations that talks about how to move from a trauma-inducing to a trauma-reducing organizational culture.

Integrating Community Health Workers into Complex Care Teams: Key Considerations

> This brief from the Center for Health Care Strategies, Inc. provides strategies for maximizing the impact of Health Center workers through improved organizational practices.

What About You? A Workbook for Those Who Work with Others

> This handbook from The National Center on Family Homelessness provides guided strategies for employees to establish their own self-care practices.

Healing Centered Engagement in a Post-Covid World

> A video by Flourish Agenda where Dr. Shawn Ginwright talks about what Healing Centered Engagement can look like for Organizations.

Addressing Burnout

Battling Burnout: Self-Care And Organizational Tools To Increase Community Health Worker Retention And Satisfaction

> This resource from Health Leads provides insight on how organizations can support Health Center workers.

Creative Ways to Minimize Burnout and Encourage Self-Care Among Social Sector Employees

> This blog from Nonprofit HR provides creative ways for addressing burnout in helping professions.

Self-care for Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC)

4 Self-Care Practices For Women Of Color In The Workplace

> A blog takes an intersectional approach to self-care practices for Women of Color in the workplace.

Anti-Racism Resources

> A compendium of self-care resources by Harvard University specifically for BIPOC that includes mental health, mindfulness, and emotional well-being resources.

Tools

Self-care Starter Kit

> A self-care starter kit put together by the University of Buffalo School of Social Work. It provides an introduction to self-care, examples of exercises, and activities to help begin your own self-care plan.

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