

The dragons of **stress**, **burnout** and **vicarious trauma** may be attacking...

Take Dragon Fighting Lessons

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... or get fried.





# What Makes us Vulnerable in our Work Context?

- empathy;
- personal experience;
- workload;
- age, experience & qualifications/perceptions of it;
- hearing the heart-wrenching, shocking stories;
- wanting to make a difference;
- guilt and discomfort.

# Stress Management Lessons

1. Identify what you are struggling with:  
stress; burnout; vicarious trauma
2. Understand the impact and the  
environment contributing to it
3. Know your strengths, weaknesses and  
resources
4. Create some strategies

# WHO Definition of Health (1946)

"a state of complete **physical, mental, and social** well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

Mental ill-health is associated with physical ill-health and vice versa...



# Stress

- appears when the demands are greater than our resources

# Stress Warning Signs and Symptoms

<b>1. Cognitive Symptoms</b>	<b>2. Emotional Symptoms</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Memory problems</li><li>■ Inability to concentrate</li><li>■ Poor judgment</li><li>■ Seeing only the negative</li><li>■ Anxious or racing thoughts</li><li>■ Constant worrying</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Moodiness</li><li>■ Irritability or short temper</li><li>■ Agitation, inability to relax</li><li>■ Feeling overwhelmed</li><li>■ Sense of loneliness and isolation</li><li>■ Depression or general unhappiness</li></ul>
<b>3. Physical Symptoms</b>	<b>4. Behavioral Symptoms</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Aches and pains</li><li>■ Diarrhoea or constipation</li><li>■ Nausea, dizziness</li><li>■ Chest pain, rapid heartbeat</li><li>■ Loss of sex drive</li><li>■ Frequent colds</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Eating more or less</li><li>■ Sleeping too much or too little</li><li>■ Isolating yourself from others</li><li>■ Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities</li><li>■ Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax</li><li>■ Nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing)</li></ul>

# Burnout

- state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion caused by long term involvement in emotionally demanding situation
- “the total psychic energy of a person is consumed in trying to maintain the fires of existence” – energy crisis
- Tiredness, emotional depletion, too much caring and too little self caring
- Burnout has 3 dimensions:
  - Emotional exhaustion
  - Depersonalization (negative attitude towards patients)
  - Reduced personal accomplishment and commitment

# The environment: Burnout

- Workload
- Control issues
- Lack of reward
- Absence of support or community
- Lack of fairness
- Discordant values
- The stories

# Potential Impact of Stress and Burnout

## Service provider

- Fatigue and inattention: increased errors in judgment, increased workplace injuries
- Behavioral changes: irritability, somatic complaints, substance abuse; distancing from family and friends
- Anger, fear, guilt
- Depression: inability to cope
- Fear of stigma/violence: increased focus on self and insensitive to patients
- Absenteeism, tardiness, poor job performance; colleague/interpersonal conflict

## Patient

- Decreased quality of care
- Physical or verbal abuse towards patients
- Insensitivity to the needs of patients

# Vicarious Trauma

In SA, trauma experiences can be part of the life stories we hear. When these become overwhelming - the impact of vicarious trauma can be felt...

# Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) DSM-IV

- Experienced an event in which the life or physical safety of oneself or other was threatened or damaged.
- The individual experienced intense fear, helplessness, or horror in response.
- The individual continues to **re-experience** the event after it is over.
- The individual seeks to **avoid** reminders of the event
- The individual exhibits signs of persistent **arousal**
- **Flight – fight – freeze response of autonomic nervous system ‘gets stuck’**

# PTS

vs

# CTS

- Single or multiple
- Past
- Past threat
- Safety can be re-established
- Co-morbidity can be treated
- Substance abuse can be treated
- Trust in state systems of protection eg police
- Often no threat to family or community networks and systems

- Multiple and ongoing
- Present
- Threat is current and real
- Safety difficult to establish
- Co-morbidity difficult to treat
- Maladaptive coping means survival
- Lack of trust in state systems of protection and help
- Threat to family and community networks and systems
- High frequency events/dose response
- Helplessness

# Proximity of Trauma

- Simple view: closer to the event, fewer people are effected but the effect is more intense (a spatial view)
- Greater the proximity, larger the impact will be
- However, proximity not just spatial  
Spatial; Relational; Temporal
- Relational proximity increases, impact dramatically increases
- Meaning impacted in relation to other events and characteristics of events
- Recognise event in broader context

# Vicarious Trauma

- Ongoing traumatic exposure as a result of regular exposure to traumatized persons
- Become traumatised by clients' stories
- You feel changed, world view challenged, intrusive imagery, avoidance, hyperarousal
- Confusion, tearfulness, isolation, anger, irritability, sense of powerlessness, hopelessness, intellectualise, resistance to change, burdened, rigidity, believe client's problem are insurmountable or insignificant
- Psychosomatic symptoms, personal vulnerability and survivor guilt

# Impact of Vicarious Trauma on researchers; service providers

- Anger at other Service Providers
- Powerless and guilt
- Gender
- Generalisations
- Personal safety
- Fear and forboding
- Distancing from friends and family
- Effects of researching your own community
- Alcohol

# Self Care: Definition

Looking after yourself:

- Within your work context
- Within your personal context



# Why is it important to take care of ourselves?

To be holistically healthy individuals, in our professional and personal lives.

- Creates positivity and confidence
- More able to manage the roles we have
- To feel more supported and less isolated
- To give higher quality of care and service
- To feel more confident in talking to other professionals about experiences and needs
- To be self aware and understand the motivation and the reason we do the job that we are doing at this point – to reconnect to the meaning of our work for ourselves.
- To be able to function to our best ability at home

What have you put in place for you?



**HOW OTHERS SEE YOU IS NOT IMPORTANT,  
HOW YOU SEE YOURSELF MEANS EVERYTHING**

more awesome pictures at [THEMETAPICTURE.COM](http://THEMETAPICTURE.COM)

# Self Care Tips in the Work Place

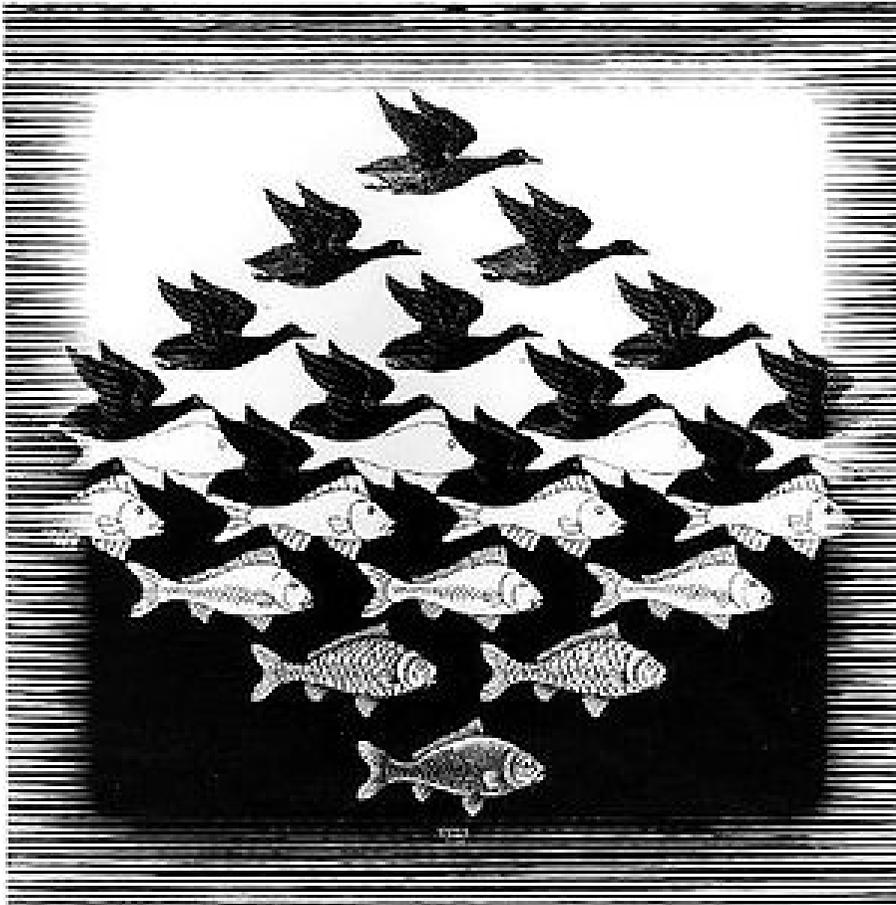
- Sharing with colleagues / talking it through at work
- Regular Breaks
- Openness about difficulties experienced at work
- Time-Management and shift management
- Time-Out (including occasional half days)
- Unwinding outside work with colleagues
- Formal talk therapy and counselling outside of work
- Debriefing
- Support from managers; work-load management; clear reporting strategies; fairness at work

# Build your support structures

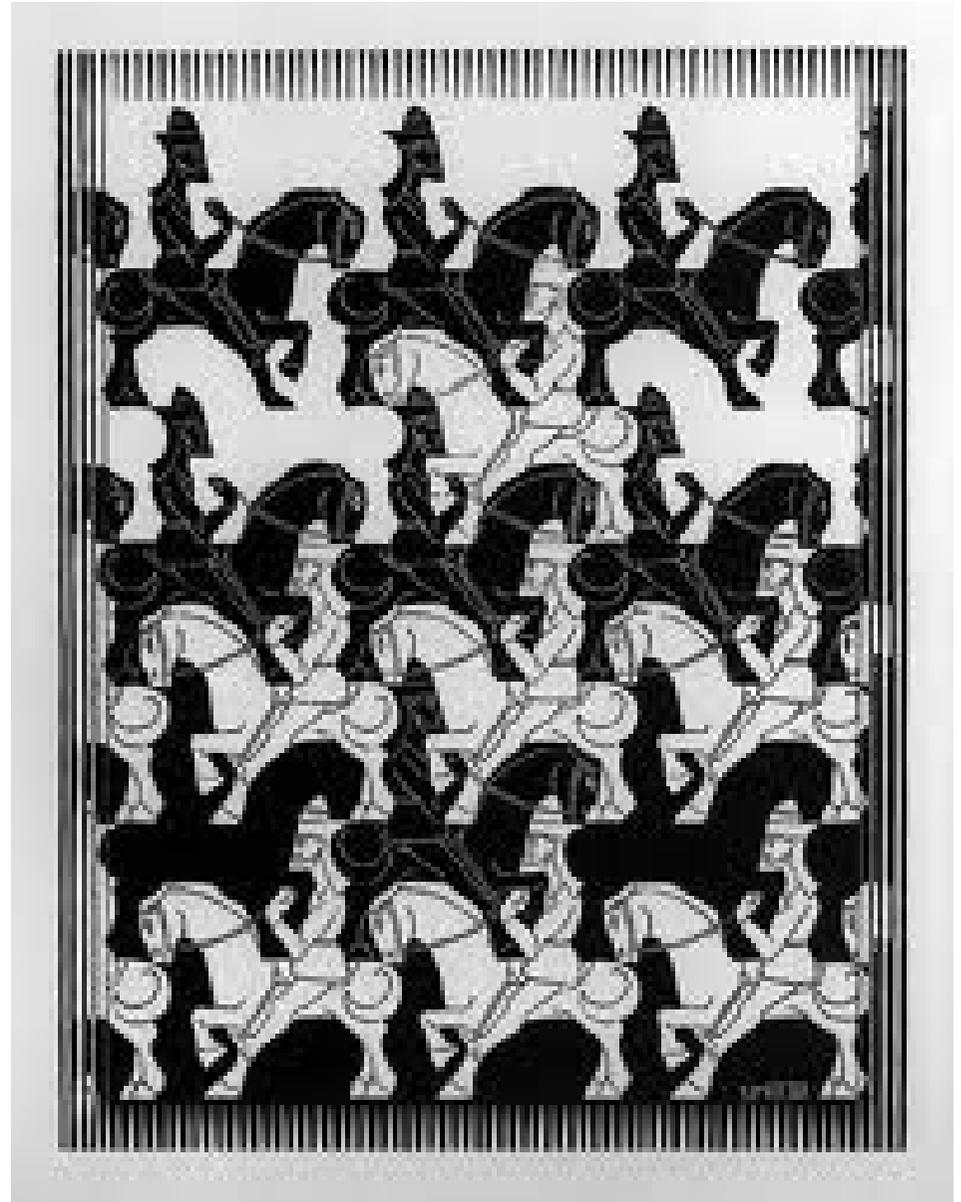
- Remember your family and your support system – draw on your friends and family
- Speak with your manager when something is not working out
- If for several days you are feeling exhausted, detached (not yourself), feeling low; not recognising your work achievements; and find that you are not working effectively, you may need a break –

**take it.**





Escher



Negative Space  
Noma Bar

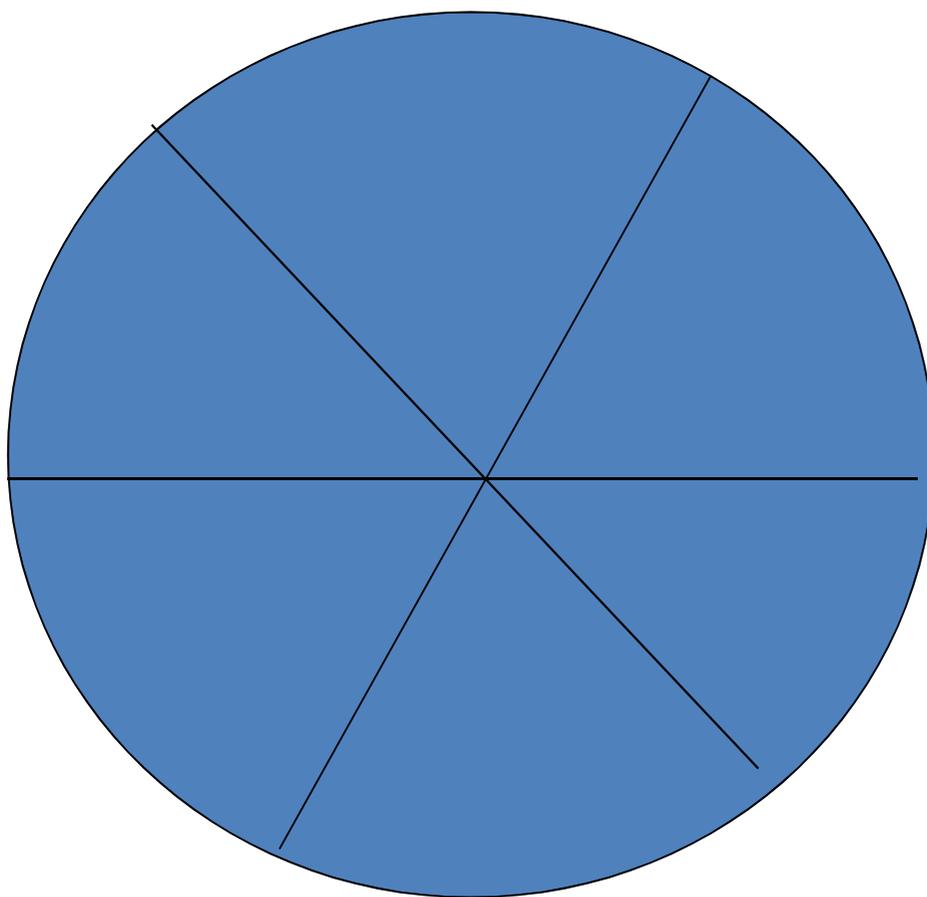


# Hard to “see” both images

- We are largely programmed to “see” only one focal point...we are good investigators of that one focus.
- It is difficult to ‘let go’ of what we see and challenge ourselves and “see” the other focal point.
- We get so used to looking at something right in front of us that we stop “seeing” it and resultantly, don’t address it.
- Positive images are ALWAYS supported by negative space that is crucial for their existence.

# Balance the wheels of life

1. Take an A4 piece paper
2. Draw a dot in the centre, representing you
3. Now think of the key things that you invest energy in...your significant relationship, work, children, studies, faith, friends, hobby, sport...etc
4. Draw a line from the dot with the length of the line representing the energy that you invest in each of these areas
5. Connect the ends of the line – does your wheel roll?



# **Your strategies for the next month?**

- For support
- For managing work load
- For self awareness
- For unwinding
- For relaxation
- For growth
- For self-care

# Acknowledgments...

- Kirsten Thomson
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