

A motion picture media review of:

Boaz, J. & Panos, A. (Producers). (1998) *When helping hurts: Sustaining trauma workers* [Motion picture]. (Available from Gift from Within, 16 Cobb Hill Road, Camden, ME 04843 USA, 207 236-8858 ph, 207 236-2818 fax; [www.giftfromwithin.org](http://www.giftfromwithin.org)). (50 minutes; VHS or DVD, \$75)

*When helping hurts: Sustaining trauma workers* is the video precursor to *When helping hurts: Preventing and treating compassion fatigue*, also reviewed here. In addition to a discussion of compassion fatigue (compassion stress/secondary traumatization), this somewhat longer video presentation includes a brief discussion of burnout and countertransference as well. Like ...*Preventing and treating compassion fatigue*, ...*Sustaining trauma workers* presents brief clips of trauma specialists discussing the difficulties (and possible remedies) that may occur for empathic trauma workers—those who rescue, therapeutically intervene, or support intervention efforts during and following traumatic events. Because of its length, there are more disaster/trauma scenes (interspersed among the interview clips) than in the shorter version.

Written titles precede each section of the video presentation to guide the viewer. The sections include clips of the trauma specialists (sometimes published experts on the related issue) and a firefighter discussing the topic of the section title. After a brief introduction, section one, *Who is the Trauma Worker?*, identifies those who may be vulnerable to compassion stresses, including those who directly and peripherally assist the traumatized. Section two, *What is compassion fatigue?*, includes brief segments on compassion stress/secondary traumatization, burnout, and countertransference. In section

three, *Symptoms of compassion fatigue*, specialists discuss the indicators of compassion fatigue (or other possible precursors to burnout such as secondary traumatization or countertransference) that may affect a trauma worker and his or her life, work, and relationships. In section four, *Reducing Effects of Compassion Fatigue*, the professionals discuss methods of assisting oneself or others suffering from empathic distress. The next section, *How Do You Help the Person Who Refuses to Get Help*, suggests methods of helping employees or coworkers who may be affected by compassion fatigue or empathic distress or ways to inspire them to get help. *Clinician Self-care* has a description of important methods of self-care followed by more on the preceding topic. *What's Next? Where Do We Go From Here?* proposes research and world-wide networking to assist those who may be affected by their compassionate work in response to traumatic events.

This video presentation provides an excellent opportunity to view and learn from a number of professionals who have had a great deal of experience with the intensities of trauma work. Their discussions of trauma's impact on the trauma worker are from first-hand personal and supervisory experience. Some obviously heartfelt descriptions demonstrate the empathy that may result in the forms of distress described. Combined with images of traumatic scenes, these clips may arouse empathy in viewers and may be difficult for some individuals who are traumatically or compassionately distressed.

The video is an excellent supplement to the books that offer thorough written descriptions of these issues (i.e., compassion fatigue and other forms of empathic distress) and to the books and workshops that provide detailed exercises or practices to help remedy or prevent the possible ill effects of this often intense, work. Although *Reducing Effects of Compassion Fatigue* and *Clinician Self-care* might best have been

combined (or at least consecutive) because of their overlap and commonality, most of the time, professional comments are included in the appropriate section headings. Despite its somewhat harsh labeling (“...who refuse to get help”) and occasional intense remark, the section on helping those, who may not recognize the need for help or who are reluctant or resistant to seeking help, provides useful information for supervisors and concerned coworkers.

It is essential for trauma workers to be aware of the possible effects of engaging in trauma work. *When helping hurts: Sustaining trauma workers* assists that understanding. This video provides a good supplemental or primary introduction to the topic of empathy related distress for students or trainees who will become trauma workers and for those who are already a part of this important field of intervention. As is true for any book or video on this topic, cautions apply regarding the timing of its use with students and regarding its impact on those who are already significantly distressed. As described earlier in this issue, a newer, shorter version is available for use in the classroom or during workshops.

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