

# Outcomes From a Compassion Training Intervention for Healthcare Workers



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# PhD research investigating the relationship between the perception of common humanity and compassion in healthcare workers

PhD research study utilised a mixed methods approach. The research involved two components:

1. Pre/post intervention study – how viewing common humanity scenarios impacts on compassion in healthcare workers (N=75)
2. Trialled and evaluated a compassion training session (N=100) (topic of this presentation)



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## Major Compassion Research Institutes



Stanford Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education



Centre for Healthy Minds, University of Wisconsin – Madison



Greater Good Science Center, University of California, Berkeley

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## COMPASSION IN PRACTICE:

Achieving Better Outcomes by Maximizing  
Communication, Relationships and Resilience

October 29-30, 2017 in Boston



NHS

## Compassion in Practice

Two years on



Experience matters



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# Recognition of the importance of compassion training

1. Healthcare workers benefit
2. Patients benefit
3. Healthcare organisation benefits

Stanford University developed the 8 week Compassion Cultivation Training course.

Emory University developed the 8 week Cognitively Based Compassion Training program

Compassion training programs are being delivered in hospitals, schools, palliative care settings, businesses, caregivers and to the general public.

Difficult for healthcare workers to attend an 8 week course during work time due to shift work and workload.

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## Overview of content in the compassion training intervention

1. Definition of compassion
  2. Research findings showing that compassion is a positive state of mind and utilises different neural pathways to empathy.
  3. Perception of common humanity is central to compassion – use of slogan “Just like me, this person wishes to be happy and not to suffer”
  4. Five “Common Humanity” scenarios.
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# Compassion as a Core Value

## Compassion Definition:

A sense of concern that arises when we are confronted with another's suffering and feel motivated to see that suffering relieved (Jinpa 2016)

- Compassion is a core value in healthcare and for health professionals including social work, nursing, medicine.
- Compassion is a virtue in all cultures - holds an elevated status due to its inclusiveness of all humans.



Compassion taps into the sentiments of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948):

***“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”***

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## Compassion and related terms

- **Compassion** - a sense of concern that arises when we are confronted with another's suffering and the motivation to see that suffering relieved (Jinpa 2016)
  - **Pity** - condescending view of the other, lacks respect for the other (Von Dietze & Orb 2000)
  - **Empathy** - affected by and sharing another's emotions (Gilbert 2010)
  - **Sympathy** - a certain affinity with someone, harmony with their feelings and feeling kindly towards them (Ricard 2013)
  - **Altruism** - selfless behavior to assist another, can be at considerable personal cost to self (Strauss et al. 2016)
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# Compassion research – what the science is showing

A range of fMRI studies over the last 10-15 years are now showing that compassion is:

1. A positive state of mind, leads to feelings of warmth, concern, reward and affiliation (Klimecki et al. 2013; Preckel et al. 2018)

2. Compassion can be trained (Leiberg et al. 2011, Weng et al. 2013)

3. Compassion leads to a range of prosocial outcomes including:

- increased caring behaviours
- social connectedness
- altruism

(Hofman et al. 2011; Mayseless 2011; Preston 2013)

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## Compassion research – what the science is showing cont'

4. Compassion improves healthcare worker wellbeing (Fredrickson et al. 2013; Klimecki et al. 2013)
  5. Compassion leads to less stress in the caregiver (Dahl, Lutz & Davidson 2015)
  6. Compassion has a positive impact on those who witness and receive it (Kanov et al. 2004)
  7. Compassion and empathy use different neural pathways (Klimecki et al. 2014)
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## Compassion and empathy are two different things

**Compassion** is an other-focused emotion. It arises in response to another's suffering and encompasses a wish to relieve the other's suffering.

**Empathy** – where we are affected by and share another's emotions – can go down two paths – one positive, the other negative.

- 1. Empathic concern**, which is other-focused, is positive. Stay concerned with the other's wellbeing.
  - 2. Empathic distress**, where you overidentify with another's suffering and either *imagine their pain* or *you become distressed by their suffering*, is a negative neural pathway. Empathic distress is self-focused.
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# Empathic Distress Fatigue

The term “Compassion Fatigue” is now understood to be a misnomer, it is actually “Empathic Distress Fatigue”.

Klimecki, O. and Singer, T., 2012. Empathic distress fatigue rather than compassion fatigue? Integrating findings from empathy research in psychology and social neuroscience. *Pathological altruism*, pp.368-383.

Ashar, Y.K., Andrews-Hanna, J.R., Dimidjian, S. and Wager, T.D., 2017. Empathic care and distress: predictive brain markers and dissociable brain systems. *Neuron*, 94(6), pp.1263-1273.

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## Importance of the Perception of Common Humanity

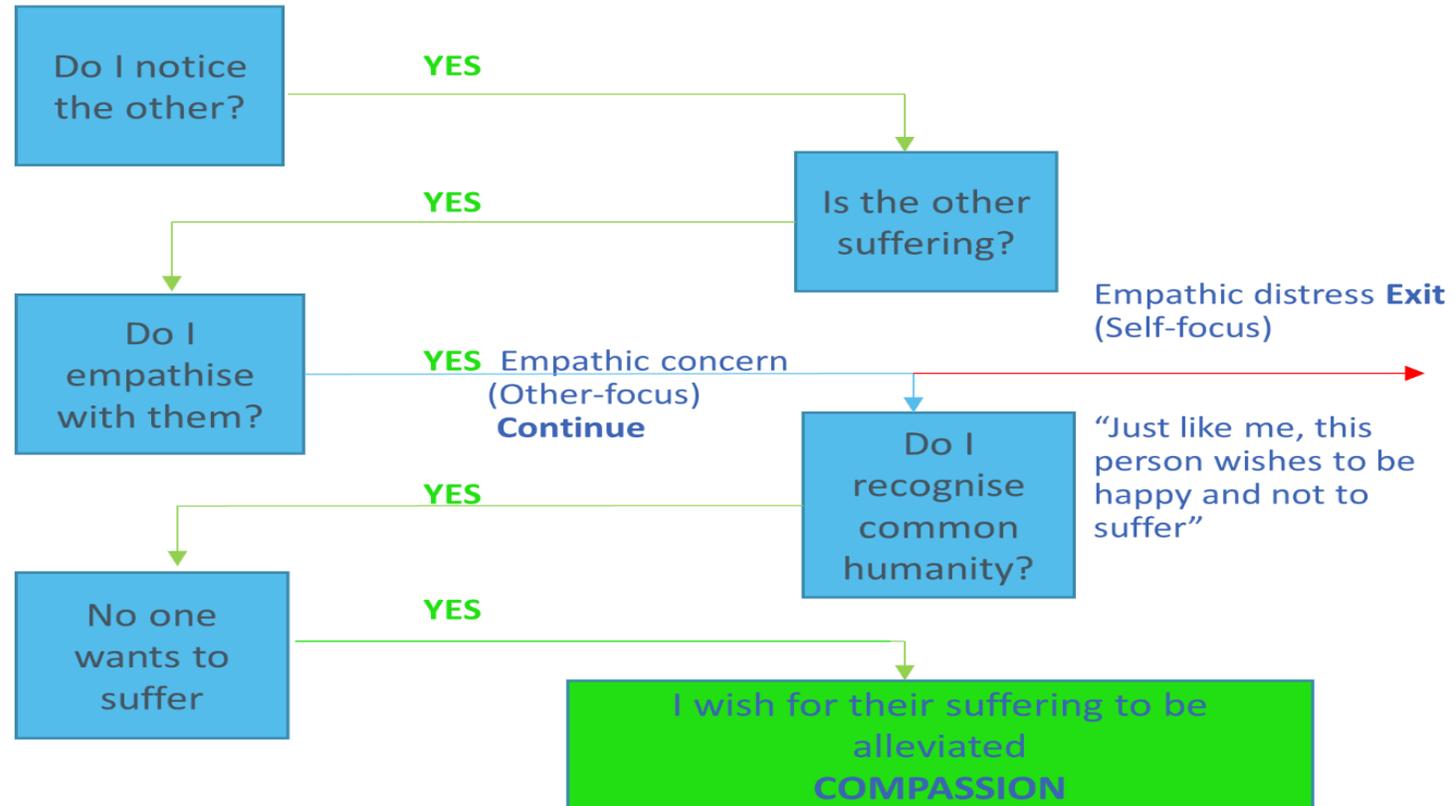
- Influential research by Kristen Renwick Monroe (1998) on common humanity. Offers an explanation as to why levels of compassion vary so widely between people – subjective perspective influences how people value others.
  - Suggestion that the perception of common humanity is the core component of compassion (Jinpa 2016; Van Der Cingel 2009; Von Dietze & Orb 2000).
  - Common humanity breaks down barriers, everyone becomes the “in-group” (Von Dietze & Orb 2000).
  - Recognition of human suffering as a universal phenomenon. Anyone can get sick or injured (Feldman & Kuyken 2011; Strauss et al. 2016).
  - Perception of common humanity is helpful for healthcare workers – it improves healthcare worker wellbeing and makes it easy to have compassion for every patient.
  - Hospitals provide care to someone who is injured irrespective of whether the person contributed to an accident through illegal activity or is the innocent victim of the accident.
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## Compassion is a “wish” for the other’s suffering to be relieved, it precedes action

- You can still have compassion for someone where you are not successful in preventing their suffering e.g. palliative care or starving children in Africa.
  - The important point is that the arising of compassion in yourself is still a positive state of mind and better than pity or empathic distress. It’s protective against healthcare worker burnout.
  - Compassion precedes prosocial action, but it’s a fact of life that we can’t always prevent the suffering of others.
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# The Compassion Process



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## Five common humanity scenarios

Danish TV2 Advertisement [“All that we share”](#)

Simon Lewis [Humanitarian Lifeguard](#) “they are people like anyone else”.

[US prison inmates](#) saving the life of prison guard who had heart attack.

[Homeless man](#) helps women and children after bombing.

[Father](#) who risks his life to save fellow passenger who fell onto [New York railway tracks](#).

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# Evaluation

A survey was administered post compassion training.

Twenty-two healthcare workers responded.

80% said it was useful to have information on the neuroscience behind compassion.

100% said it was useful to have information on compassion being a positive mind state whereas too much empathy can lead to burnout.

80% said the slogan “Just like me, this person wishes to be happy and not to suffer” was useful.

80% said it was useful to view material on common humanity.

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## Qualitative comments

“That all of us just want to be loved and live happily”

“Put yourself in their place”

“Find the commonality between myself and another”

“To remember they are ‘just like me’ with the same hopes and fears”

“Try to imagine others’ perspectives, we are all human”

“Looking at common human traits”

“Reflecting on others’ feelings and others’ points of view”

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## Organisation wide impact of the compassion training

- Epworth HealthCare management requested the development of a compassion eLearn so that all 7,000 staff can access the content from the compassion training.
  - Compassion training has since been delivered in face-to-face format to over 250 different healthcare professionals at Epworth HealthCare.
  - A multidisciplinary compassion working party is being established to brainstorm further ways to embed compassion in daily work communication and practices.
  - Further research is being undertaken to determine if patients report higher levels of compassion in staff who have undertaken the compassion training.
  - Requests for the compassion training content have come from around the world after the research was published last year.
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## Questions and Answers?

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