



# THE POWER OF SELF-COMPASSION



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In the emergency department or other emergency care settings, there is very little downtime. Contrary to inferences made by my state representatives that nurses relax and play cards during shifts, we all know the reality of our care settings. We are required to work hard with limited resources every day. We are the safety net for our communities, and we address all patients that present to us, whatever the circumstances, because, unlike other hospital units, the emergency department has no cap for census.

We know that emergency nurses face a high rate of burnout.<sup>1,2</sup> The struggles of increased workload and situations such as workplace violence are often cited as reasons for this. And let's face it, how many times have you taken care of a critically ill patient or had a patient who has just passed away and you walk out of the patient's room to go directly into another room to care for another patient?

Recently, I attended a meeting with other leaders from my hospital. We talked about compassion, specifically discussing the idea that if you cannot practice self-compassion, then you cannot express compassion to others. A presenter at the meeting described a useful technique we can all use to exercise more self-compassion. He talked about the importance of taking the time to stop and reflect throughout the busy day: to simply be still in the moment and breathe.

This led me to reflect back on a practice we followed in an emergency department where I had previously worked. Anytime we had a patient who passed away, we all would

take a few moments before we left the room: just a bit of time to think about the event and realize we had just cared for someone's loved one. If the patient did not have loved ones present at the time, we would recognize that the person we had just cared for was loved by someone, and they would be mourning the loss. This gave us time to stop and reflect before moving on to care for our other patients.

We are just beginning to see the end of winter. As we know, this time of year, in addition to the seasonal holidays, increases stress for many people. We also faced another stressful flu season. Our lives are busy with day-to-day nursing operations; however, adding these extra stressors takes an additional toll on us, no matter how experienced we are or how "strong" we believe we are.

I challenge us all to take a moment to consciously "Pause"<sup>3</sup> and take a breath throughout our days, especially after facing a critical situation or the death of a patient. I also ask you to encourage your coworkers to engage in this practice, and when you notice they're under stress, remind them to take a moment to reflect and take a deep breath. This moment can be as simple as when we have walked out of a room and are gelling with hand sanitizer, and we simply stand and take that deep breath as we rub in the gel. Or this moment can take place at unexpected times, such as when we are logging into our electronic medical record, and instead of experiencing frustration that the program is not moving quickly enough, we use that moment to contemplate.

As we know, One Person Can Make a Difference, so consider the power of a moment of self-compassion, take that moment to be still and reflect and encourage others to do the same.

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