



Forum on Rural Population Health

May 19-21, 2025
Seaside, Oregon
ohsu.edu/orhforum



Self-Compassion for Healthcare Workers

Erika Wolfe, Adventist Health Columbia Gorge
Jasmin Huila Flores, Adventist Health Columbia Gorge



Self-Compassion for Healthcare Workers

**Forum on Rural Population Health
May 2025**

Healthcare, including social work, **is a high-stress profession** that involves working with people in distressing circumstances and complex life situations, such as those experiencing abuse, domestic violence, substance misuse and crime.

Healthcare workers often work with the most vulnerable:

People who are chronically ill

Older people

Children

People with mental illness and/or addictions

People who are houseless

Secondary Trauma

Can be the result of this constant exposure to the life experiences of others



Also known as "*compassion fatigue*," it can occur with regular exposure to the suffering of those we serve

Secondary trauma can be a prelude to burn-out

Heavy workloads

Patient/client ratio per worker is overwhelming given the complex needs.

Lack of recognition

No individual or team celebrations.

Low pay

Pay that does not keep up with the cost of living.

Social disconnection from co-workers

Lack of team bonding activities or communication with peers. Work silos.

Constant exposure to people's negative life circumstances

Patients or client's crisis become the employee's crisis too.

Lack of support from management

Lack of understanding or advocacy on behalf of employees. Lack of professional development opportunities

If not addressed, *burn-out* can result.

Burn-out happens the *capacity to cope* exceeds the perceived demands or pressures a person is experiencing.



Healthcare workers **need support
to alleviate the burden and stress
of helping people
in often traumatic situations.**

In order to effectively combat burn-out, employers should offer a staff wellness program.

This support can be...

Self-Compassion

- Treat yourself as you would a friend, by being mindful and understanding your situation in the context of the larger human experience. It means understanding and acting kindly towards yourself.

Stress Management

- Develop your toolkit for stress management, using meditation, mindfulness or prayer. Staying healthy is also important: exercise, sleep and a healthy diet.

Peer Support

- This buddy system helps staff to feel heard and acknowledged by those who understand the intricacies of the work.

Self-compassion can be

Practiced with mindfulness, meditation or prayer.

An opportunity to offer the same grace and compassion to yourself as you would a co-worker or friend.

It is also an opportunity to re-fill your own well of compassion.

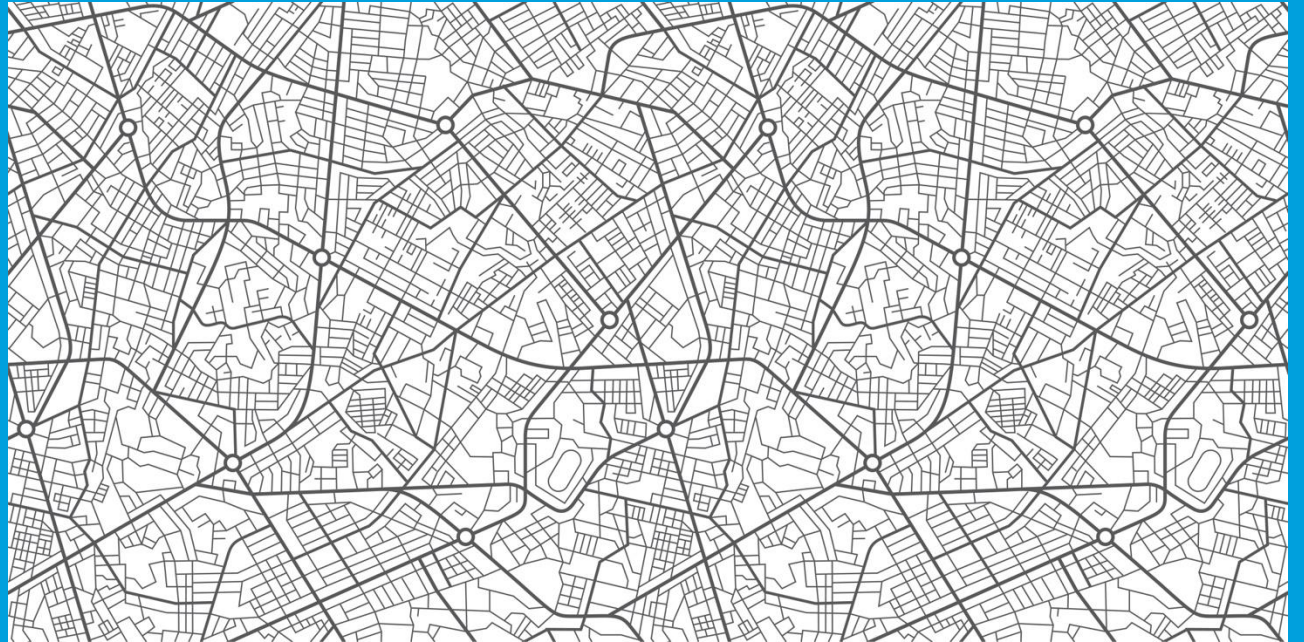


Stress management includes

- Meditation or prayer
- Yoga or tai chi
- Any kind of exercise
- Breathing exercises
- Peer support
- Group support



Our Roadmap for Peer Support: A Case Study



Peer Support Is Self-care for the Whole Team



Monthly Meetings

During each monthly staff meeting there is a guided self-compassion meditation and encouraged to practice on their own

Peer Support

Staff are encouraged to meet with their Peer Support partner weekly, or regularly

Employer-sponsored Resources

Staff are given a list of employer resources and encouraged to use them.

Peer Support Wellness

A pilot project

At Adventist Health Columbia Gorge Case Management department, [wellness has become an important aspect of work](#).

Because we mostly work remote, it is easy for staff to feel siloed and not connected to their peers. With the help of our Wellness Coach, a [Peer Support Wellness Pilot Project](#) was initiated with a cohort of Community Health Workers and Social Support Navigators.

The peer support wellness check-ins was compromised of the following:

- Each staff member was paired up with another for 3 months
- Weekly 30-minute peer-support check-ins were highly encouraged
- There were a few parameters established that included helpful tips
- A pre and post survey was provided to assess effectiveness and attitude toward the pilot project



Here are some guidelines for those conversations:

Helpful hints

- **Sometimes, a person just wants to be heard**
- **Just listening can be very helpful**
- **Advice is not always wanted**
- **Give positive feedback if asked for**
- **Follow up in the next conversation if needed**
- **Keep discussions confidential (except for safety concerns)**

Not So Helpful

- Gossip
- The urge to fix a situation for someone
- Not having regular conversations

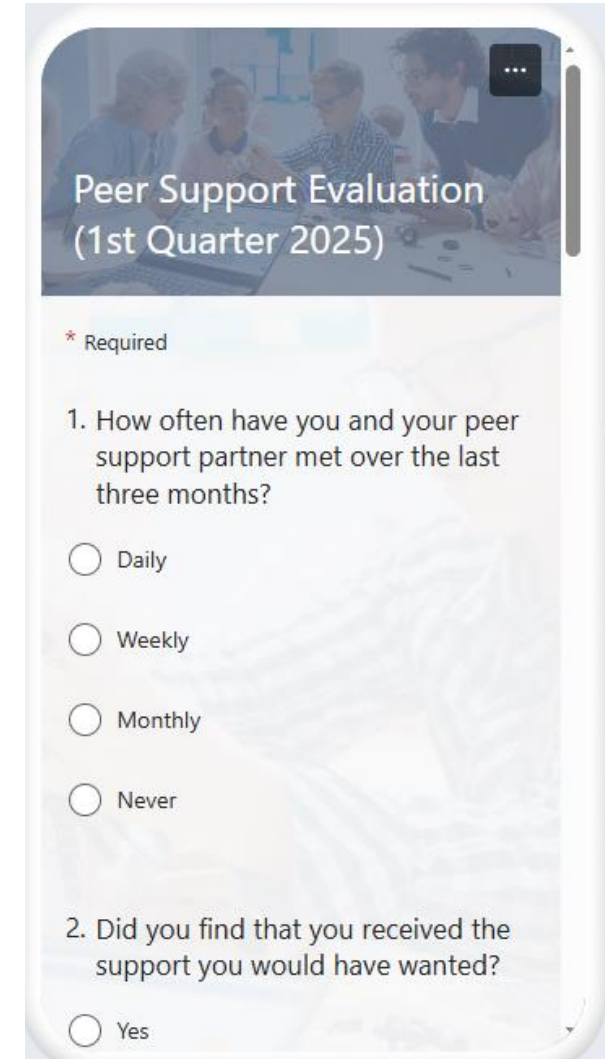
How we evaluate the effectiveness of our program?

At the beginning of the quarter staff were asked the following questions in a pre-survey:

- What is your stress level *at this time*?
- What is your assessment of your own self-care skills?
- What is your assessment of the support you receive?
- What is your overall satisfaction with work?

Continued....

At the end of the quarter, a post survey was sent to staff to gather information on their experience and attitude toward the pilot project.



Peer Support Evaluation
(1st Quarter 2025)

* Required

1. How often have you and your peer support partner met over the last three months?

☐ Daily

☐ Weekly

☐ Monthly

☐ Never

2. Did you find that you received the support you would have wanted?

☐ Yes

Outcomes & Lessons

Outcomes:

- As a result of this pilot project, staff felt heard and supported
- People felt like they learned something **new** from their teammates

Lessons Learned:

- Getting buy-in can be challenging
- Implementing a peer support wellness program is a **preventative measure**
- Everyone's comfort level about sharing personal or work-related matters is different
- It was suggested to have a list of conversation starters

3. Did you feel listened to/heard?

| | |
|------------|---|
| ● Yes | 6 |
| ● No | 0 |
| ● Not sure | 0 |
| ● Maybe | 1 |

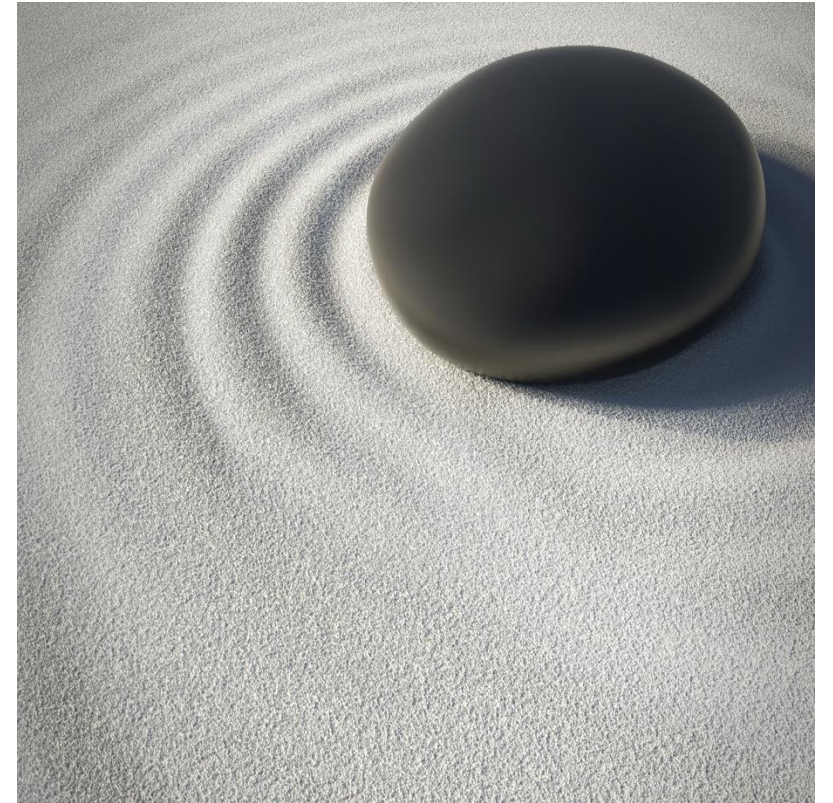


We also worked on
developing
Self-compassion...

“

Self-compassion is like a muscle.
The more we practice flexing it, the
stronger and more resilient our
compassion muscle becomes."

--*Sharon Salzberg* "



Let's Practice!

Resources:

Self-compassion exercises by Kristen Neff

<https://self-compassion.org/self-compassion-practices/Self-compassion>

"Real Change"

Sharon Salzberg, Sept. 2020

<https://sharonsalzberg.com>

OSU Center for Integrative Health

<https://wexnermedical.osu.edu/integrative-health>



Thank you!





Thank you to the 2025 Forum partners!

Forum on Rural
Population Health

