The Interdisciplinary “Healing the Healer Group”: A Qualitative Study of the Effects of a Pilot Educational Program for Healthcare Teams

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Background

- ❖ Healthcare workers, including those working with severely ill cancer patients are at risk for compassion fatigue & burnout
- ❖ Professional education focuses on specific clinical skills, with rare opportunities to discuss complex patient encounters in depth
- ❖ Few workplace educational interventions that aim to foster positive professional formation or compassion satisfaction have been evaluated.

Purpose

- ❖ To evaluate the effects of a pilot educational program designed to foster professional formation and decrease burnout in interdisciplinary healthcare teams

The Healing the Healer Group

Specific Format (1 hr, Small Group)

- 1. Relaxation/Centering** - very brief
- 2. Invitation** – for a spontaneous “case”
- 3. Presentation** – volunteer presents their uninterrupted story
- 4. Clarification** - facilitator invites clarifying questions
- 5. Group Reflection** – group takes on the “case”
- 6. Careful Facilitation** - facilitator promotes safe environment, helps identify themes re: challenges
- 7. Group Problem Solving** - opportunities to share group expertise, ideas
- 8. Presenter's Reflection** – thoughts, insights gained
- 9. Relaxation/Centering** – exercise to allow insights gained “settle”

Key Elements in Design

- Clear Purpose:** to grow professionally and personally
- Clear Ground Rules:**
- focus on experience
 - caring for patients & family
 - avoid organizational issues
 - avoid detailed focus on medical management
- Safety:** confidentiality, respect
- Facilitator Experience:**
- clinical experience
 - group facilitation experience
 - able to facilitate discussion of a variety of issues – clinical, emotional & spiritual

Healing the Healer Group: Educational Theory

Theoretical Model

Methods

Program Development & Implementation

- ❖ Observation/needs assessment
- ❖ Literature review
- ❖ Theoretical framework
- ❖ Program design
- ❖ Program implementation

Study Methods

- ❖ Multi-method
 - ❖ Implementation results
 - ❖ Field Notes Analysis
 - ❖ Individual Interview Study
- Eligibility:** Participated in 5 or more sessions
- Data:** Semi-structured interview guide. Interviews audio recorded, transcribed verbatim
- Analysis:** by 4 researchers (Immersion/crystallization)
- ❖ IRB Approval obtained

Results

Field Note Analysis: Group Observations

IDG Group (nurses, social workers, chaplains)	Hospice Aids (HHA) Group
Watching suffering, when you know you can do something, but not allowed to help (eg. morphine, falls)	Watching suffering (especially when family cannot “see” eg. do not medicate)
Boundaries (mostly related to doing what is needed vs. what is wanted)	Boundaries – common theme (mostly related to emotional attachments)
Understanding patient/family better (eg. culture, complex dynamics, fears)	Emotional attachment to patient and family (becoming part of the family; but not really)
Letting go of control Letting go of the relationship (occasional)	Letting go of the relationship (common)
“a good death” – for who?	What to do when patient relies on you for too much support (wants you to stay, but you cannot)
Feeling “alone” (especially RNs); Seeking help	Caught in the middle - Balancing what the RN wants, what the family wants and what the patient wants
Dealing with anger, unfairly directed at you	
Dealing with chaotic situations – establishing order while maintaining support and respect.	
Strong dedication to job and care of patients/families	Strong dedication to the job and care of patients

Implementation Results IDG Group

Number of sessions in Year 1	13
Total number of participants	17
Number of participants per session	Median: 7 Mean: 6.5 Range: 5-8
Number of participants attending >5 IDG groups	8 (4 RNs, 2 MSWs, 2 Chaplains)

Implementation Results Hospice Aid Group

Number of sessions in Year 1	6
Total number of participants	10
Number of participants per session	Median 6.5 Mean 5.8 Range 4-7
Number of participants attending >4 IDG groups	5

Interview Study: Effects of Healing the Healer Group on Group Members

Themes	Subthemes
Personal Validation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feeling valued/appreciated (job satisfaction)<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ By the team○ By the organization
Team Cohesiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning about others roles• Increased compassion for teammates• More likely to reach out for help
Professional Growth (Learning) (learning both clinical skills and “wisdom”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning different perspectives & how to handle challenges<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Reflection on own clinical performance○ Feedback from interdisciplinary colleagues• Learning Confidence - Professional validation• Learning from colleagues – tips and approaches• Learning in a different way• Learning to find balance between professional boundaries & compassionate care
Personal Growth (Healing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emotional Healing<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Decreased isolation○ Decreases stress (a weight lifted; “emptying out”)○ Improved resilience/job satisfaction• Spiritual Healing<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Being deeply heard○ Addressing questions of meaning○ Closure/“Letting go”○ Increases ability to be present/centered

Theme 1 - Personal Validation

"I think it's the first time I'm feeling really, really supported"

"I just think it is a low cost high value way of providing support for staff and providing it in a way that encourages our own internal support to grow as well"

Theme 2 – Team Cohesiveness

"It helps me be able to reach out to that discipline instead of trying to do it all yourself"

Theme 3 – Professional Growth (Learning)

"Figure out what other ways we can do this so that we can make it right for the families and the patients"

"I think it contributes to the professional development...when you question your own professional approach or question what you did or the way you did something—to be able to get some feedback from professionals"

"You are out there by yourself, but you've got feedback that you did the best you could with the situation"

Theme 4 – Healing

Emotional Growth/Healing

"I have learned that I am not alone"
"...you feel like ahhh a twenty pound weight is lifted off your neck"
"you have a chance to vent those things, and you get them out, and you move on. And that's really important."
"You're not taking stuff home as much because you've left it here...this is the only group that allows you to do that."

Spiritual Healing

"But it's about the heart of who we are and what we do. And that--having that makes the rest of it easier"
"...feeling deeply heard and supported and understood, not fixed"
"...it's just nice to have time to sort of empty out things that you would normally carry with you. And when you carry those things with you instead of opening them up for discussion, you're less present to the next patient. So I would say you learn to be more present."

Conclusions

- ❖ The Healing the Healer pilot program was successfully implemented
- ❖ Field notes: suggest complex topics covered
- ❖ Individual interviews: deep level of participation; complex positive effects
- ❖ Seem to improved engagement with patients/families, team and organization; possible positive effects on compassion/ burnout
- ❖ Further study is needed