



Brooke Townsend, DVM - Sedgefield Animal Hospital and Dental Center

Dr. Brooke is a Greensboro native and works at Sedgefield Animal Hospital and Dental Center. A graduate of North Carolina State University, she has been practicing veterinary medicine for 14 years. Dr. Brooke enjoys working closely with pet owners to provide all of her patients with the best quality of life and medical care.

She and her husband, Murphy, are the proud parents of two beautiful girls, Eva and Lizzy, plus their four-legged family member, Lab Millie, the Dutchess of Milford adopted from Red Dog Farm Animal Rescue Network.

Dr. Brooke looks forward to meeting you and your pets! She provides care for dogs and cats including internal medicine and soft tissue surgery. She also has a strong interest in dermatology and geriatrics. Her goal is to work with you to provide your pet with the best quality of life from puppy and kitten-hood till they are ancient and gray!

Help For the Healers

"How do you do it?" As a veterinarian, I am asked this question often about my job. I find myself as a collector of stories. Each animal I see has their own story - many with wonderful outcomes but, unfortunately, some with sad endings. I learn from these stories and my practice is shaped and changed by each one. Each story stays with me and, if allowed, each one could become a weight on my shoulders, gradually burdening me more and more.

My practice works with some wonderful rescue organizations, but primarily I work with individual owners. As a veterinarian, I am here to help guide owners through difficult decision making, but ultimately the decision is theirs, not mine. Rescuers have a much more challenging position. They are faced with directly making difficult decisions every day as they try to help as many animals as possible with often very limited resources. For most rescuers, they have other jobs and families they are supporting - leaving little money and time to do this work that is so emotionally and physically exhausting. They are caregivers in every aspect of their lives, but they also must care for themselves to be able to care for others.

"How do you do it?" This is the question that many of us in caregiving roles are often asked, but pay little attention to until we reach the point of questioning whether we can continue doing what we are doing. That point is one weighed down with emotional and physical exhaustion from years of putting the needs of others ahead of our own personal needs. It has a name and it's called **compassion fatigue**. It's something that affects anyone in a caregiving role: nurses, veterinarians, rescue and shelter workers, doctors, and even those caring for loved ones. Regardless of your role the realities, the stresses and the strategies to handle it are the same.

As with all problems, the first step is recognizing there is a problem by recognizing the symptoms.

Symptoms of compassion fatigue:

- *Exhaustion: mental and physical*
- *Anger, irritability, excessive complaining*
- *Chronic physical ailments*
- *Difficulty concentrating*
- *Withdrawn, isolation from others*
- *Compulsive behaviors: overspending, overeating*
- *Feelings of being overwhelmed, sadness, depression, anxiety*
- *Diminished sense of enjoyment: with work and personal life*

It's true, rescuers and animal care workers typically get into this work because the animals are what brings us peace. Initially, this

work is our "time out", our escape from the other stressors in our lives. But this work requires incredible amounts of giving on our end. Imagine an "emotional bucket". Caregiving requires us to fill up our "emotional bucket" and then empty out, but we must be able to fill it up again!

Compassion fatigue is the act of emptying out the "emotional bucket" repeatedly without refilling it. If we don't take time for ourselves, we become depleted of body, mind and spirit and will have nothing left to give. The art of "filling up" is finding what makes us whole and what brings us peace. For everyone it is different - it may be running, yoga, a hike in the woods, reading or socializing with friends and family. It may take time to find that one thing that is your passion, but don't give up.

"Filling up" requires personal boundaries and sometimes this can be the biggest challenge. In this age of text messages and Facebook, we are essentially "on call" and reachable 24/7. Many people enjoy that connectivity, but it leaves us with no time to rejuvenate ourselves. It's necessary to set boundaries for yourself: check emails only at 9am, noon and 6pm, put the cell phone and tablet away after 8pm, and have technology free weekends on occasion to give yourself a break.

Setting those personal boundaries will likely require saying, "NO" at times- to friends, family, or coworkers. Saying NO is not a natural skill for those that value helping others. However, it is a vital one to learn and then continually practice to sustain ourselves.

Compassion fatigue is a problem, but the only ones affected by it are those who are compassionate to begin with. Remember that and be kind to yourself. We find ourselves in caregiving roles because we enjoy helping others and we want to make a difference, but we must recognize that our ability to help others is limited by our ability to care for ourselves. If you do not have compassion for yourself, you cannot truly give it to others.

Accept the reality that you cannot save everyone. Do not underestimate the importance of saving one life. You are a hero. Honor yourself and be proud of the difference you have made!

If you need additional support, be sure to reach out to your doctor to find the resources you need. Not sure if you need help? Check out the compassion fatigue self tests and other resources at: www.compassionfatigue.org

See ad on page 10