Compassion Fatigue

Definition (according to the World English Dictionary): 
*fatigue, emotional distress or apathy resulting from the constant demands of caring for others. The inability to react sympathetically to a crisis or disaster, etc., because of overexposure to previous crises, disasters, etc.*

All of us have occasional days when our motivation and energy levels vary. This fluctuation in energy is normal.

Compassion fatigue typically develops over time. It can mimic depression and once a person is “burned out,” dramatic changes are required to reverse the process. Prevention is key. Reducing stress and caring for yourself helps to avoid compassion fatigue.

Watch for these signs that you may be moving toward compassion fatigue, otherwise called caregiver burnout:

- Emotional exhaustion — feeling drained, not having anything to give even before the day begins
- Depersonalization — feeling disconnected from other people, feeling resentful, and seeing them negatively
- Reduced sense of personal accomplishment — feeling ineffective; the results achieved are not meaningful

*Shared from the writings of Alan Wolfelt, PhD, founder of Center for Life Loss and Transition*

Burnout

Burnout occurs when the person suffering compassion fatigue comes to a point that they no longer are able to care with compassion. The following are symptoms you may notice in yourself, or that a friend or family member may notice in you:

- A sense of ongoing and constant fatigue
- Decreasing interest in work
- Decrease in work production
- Withdrawal from social contacts
- Increase in use of stimulants and alcohol
- Increasing fear of death
- Change in eating patterns
- Feelings of helplessness

When to ask for help

If you feel you may be suffering compassion fatigue, talk with your doctor, nurse or pastoral care provider. Ask for assistance to find a counselor to help you at this time. Many caregivers seek professional help through this time. Helping yourself is not a sign of weakness; strong people take care of themselves.