Medical/Nursing Professional Secondary Stress Self-Awareness Questionnaire

Instructions: Find a quiet, comfortable, and private place. Read each question and respond on a separate sheet of paper by writing the first thing that comes to mind. Once you have completed a page, do not turn back to it or refer to it when working on the other pages. Work as quickly as you can without setting a pace that is too stressful.

1. What is the reason you believe denial is so prevalent in the medical setting with respect to stress for physicians, nurses, and allied health personnel? What are the most common lies you tell yourself about your own stress?
2. At this point, what are the most realistic and helpful steps you can take to prevent, limit, and learn from stress?
3. What are the ways you have heard that are excellent approaches to reducing stress and improving self-care but you feel are unrealistic in your case? What would it take to make them realistic? (“A miracle is not an acceptable answer).”
4. When you think of the terms “burnout,” “compassion fatigue,” and “chronic secondary stress,” what do you think of in terms of your own life?
5. What are the issues that make you most anxious? What are the ones you deal with the best?
6. What are the types of situations or interactions from the past that still haunt you?
7. Given the realistic demands of work and family, what would it take to balance these two areas in your life a bit more?
8. In your own case, what helps you to fall prey to the common masochistic tenet? The only worthy medical or nursing professional is the one involved enough to be on the edge of burnout or physical fatigue.
9. In what ways did your professional schooling, clinical rotations, modeling by supervisors, and initial work after graduation inadvertently teach you that taking care of yourself is a sign of weakness and that an unhealthy lifestyle is the price of being in the field of healthcare?
10. What are the “bad habits” of the people you observe in your profession that you do not want to emulate? How are you seeking to embrace the wonder, passion, and intense involvement in medicine and nursing without also absorbing the pathological side of the profession?
11. When you are under a great deal of stress, what fantasies do you have? What do you think are healthy fantasies you should act upon some day? What are the unhealthy ones if that, acted upon, would cause you and others harm?
12. What elements that are currently in your self-care protocol have been most beneficial to you? What are the least?
13. What do you struggle with most in your efforts to take care of yourself? Because your presence as a professional in the health care field means hat de facto you are a bright and accomplished person, you would not think that these struggles should be so hard for you; why are they?
14. How would people describe your attitudes toward work?
15. What should be included in your list of personal doubts and insecurities that most people would be surprised to know about you?
16. In health care, focus on the person and clinical situation that are before you is essential; what do you find are the main sources of external distraction and inner preoccupation that prevent you from doing this?
17. What are the most positive and negative affects your personality style has on the way you interact with patients? With staff?
18. When under extreme stress, what is the style of interacting with others and handling the situation that you would most like to change? What steps are necessary to produce such a change?

19. What would you include in your list of motivations for originally becoming a physician, nurse, or allied health professional? (Make the list as long as you can. Be sure to include any reasons you might now perceive as unrealistic or possible immature – e.g., status, power over other people’s life and death struggles, financial security, voyeurism, etc. – so you have as complete an accounting as possible).

20. Has the primacy of certain motivations changed for you over time? If so, how? Why do you think this is so? If this problematic in some way, what might you do about it? For those beneficial changes in priorities, how are you ensuring they remain in focus for you?

21. What are the most awkward subjects for you to discuss in relationship to your emotional and physical well-being as a health professional?

22. Where do you feel your narcissism comes into play in your role in health care?

23. What would be included in a list of what you like best about being a physician, nurse, or allied health professional? What would be on the list of what you like least?

24. What is most surprising to you about the professional life you now have?

25. What are the most frustrating aspects of your professional life? Your personal life?

26. If you have ever considered changing specialties, move to a different health care setting, or leaving the field, what are the reasons for this?

27. When you think of the profession you are now in, how would you describe it for someone thinking of entering the field now? Suppose someone asked you how you thought it would be different in 5 years, what would you say?

28. What are the most important self-care procedures you have put into place in the past 5 years? What has been their impact on you? What ways would you now like to modify your plan?

29. Given your own personality style, what types of patients do you find most challenging? What types of colleagues, subordinates, and supervisors are able to easily illicit an emotional reaction from you? Given this, what ways have you found to most effectively interact with them? (Praying for their early happy death is not a sufficient response).

30. How would you describe the seemingly beneficial and adverse impacts your professional life has had on your personal life and vice versa?

31. What are the 5 mistakes that you fear most in your work?

32. What stresses do you think you can lessen in your life by giving them some attention? What stress do you feel powerless to alter?

33. How would you describe the differences in the sources of stress and the approaches to self-care between other human services fields and that of medicine, nursing, and allied health?

34. How self-aware do you feel you are? On what do you base this conclusion? What would help you gain greater self-awareness?

35. If you were to divide your personal needs for happiness into “necessary” and “desirable,” what would be on each list? What would be on similar lists (“necessary” and “desirable”) for professional satisfaction and growth?

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36. What information about yourself do you think you most like to hide even from yourself because it makes you uncomfortable to be aware of it?

37. What is your style of dealing with conflict? How would you improve your approach? To accomplish this, what is the next step you think you should take?

38. How much time alone do you need to remain balanced? What are the ways you see that such time is scheduled for yourself?

39. How do you know when you have lost your sense of perspective? What steps do you take to regain or maintain it?

40. What role does a sense of humor and laughter play in keeping yourself and the situation you are in from getting unnecessarily “heavy?”

41. What “little things” in life do you treasure and would miss if they were not present in your life? What are the big things? How do you show that you appreciate them?

42. Of what professional accomplishments are you very proud? What are some future ones you would very much like to achieve?

43. Describe how you organize your schedule and how much control you have in your life? Are there ways this might be improved?

44. When and with whom are you most apt to react in an angry way? In a cowardly way? By withdrawing? Through avoidance?

45. Would you and others at work and home best describe you as assertive, passive, passive-aggressive, or aggressive? Is there a difference between your style in your personal life and that in your professional life? If so, how would you account for that?

46. What are the major areas of imbalance in your life? How are you addressing them? If you are not, what are some of the reasons you feel it is important to do so at this point in your life?

47. Do you know how to observe your feelings and behavior and then seek to see what cognitions (ways of thinking, perceiving, and understanding) and beliefs (schemata) are giving rise to them? If so, do you then dispute your dysfunctional thoughts as a way to keep perspective and avoid unnecessary stress/depressive thinking/self-condemnation? If not, how might you improve this area of self-awareness, self-monitoring, and increased recognition of the style of one’s self-talk, especially when under undue stress or after failure?

48. What are the most unhealthy ways you are now meeting your needs or “medicating” yourself? What unhealthy gratifications are you concerned that you might avail yourself of in the future? What are you doing to prevent, limit, or avoid this from happening?

49. What is the overall design of your daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly breaks for leisure, relaxation, quiet, and recreation? How would you describe your feelings about these times (e.g., guilt, “I deserve it,” feeling uncomfortable, preoccupied with cases, blissful, resentment that they are too few and far between, etc.)?

50. What are the types of negative statements you normally make to yourself when you fail?

51. What are the healthiest ways you cope with life’s difficulties? What are the most immature and unhealthy ways?

52. In what ways are you collaborative with other members of the health care team? What are the benefits and struggles you experience with such collaboration?
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53. What professional and personal resentments do you still carry, and when are they most likely to surface?
54. Have you had any significant losses in the past several years? If so, what has your reaction been to them? Initially and, recently, now?
55. How do you view yourself in terms of physical aspects in your life (e.g., attractiveness, physical health, eating/drinking/weight/smoking/medication and illegal drug use, and exercise patterns)?
56. What is your reaction to the statement, “Much of medical care is still an art rather than an exact science?”
57. What are you feelings about asking for help in your personal life from your family? A colleague? Professional organization? One’s physician? A psychiatrist? A psychologist or counselor? A clergyperson?
58. In your professional life, when have you been tempted to step over personal, sexual, financial or other appropriate boundaries you should have with your patients or colleagues?
59. Is there someone in your circle of friends who is both kind yet clear and direct with you, so you would feel at ease to share anything but also would feel you are getting honest guidance?
60. In what clinical situations or with what type of clients do you feel most emotionally vulnerable? In other words when you have reacted by going to either the extreme of overinvolvement or preoccupation or by closing down emotionally and seeing them as simple “a case,” “bed 2 in room 342,” or “the gallbladder in intensive care”?

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