

Unlocking the Power of Compassion to Transform Organizations

October 1st, 2025

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CEO, Schwartz Center for Compassionate Healthcare



Today's Learning Objectives



What is the Schwartz Center for **Compassionate** Healthcare?



What is **Compassion**?



Why does **Compassion** matter?



Can **Compassion** be increased?



How can **Compassion** transform organizations?



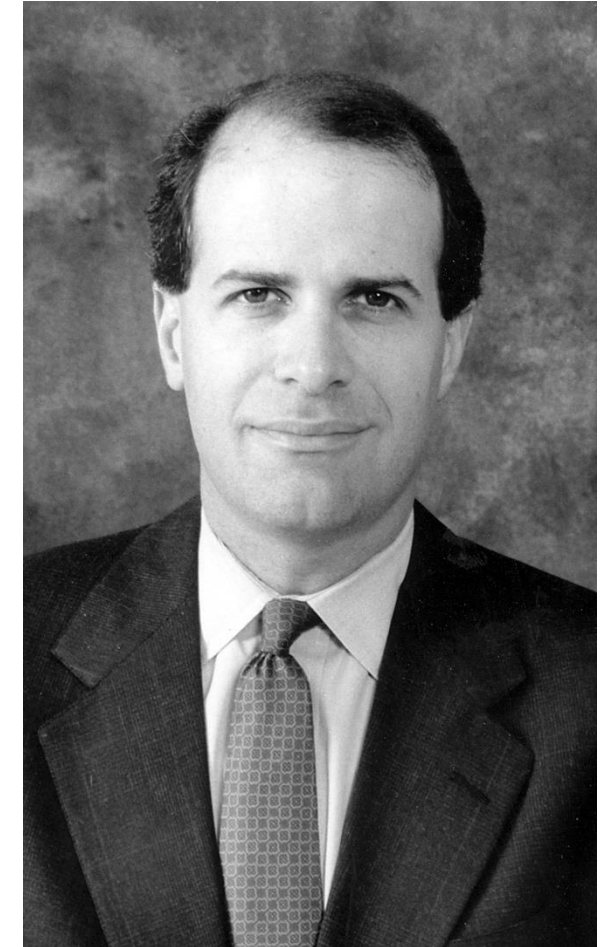
The Schwartz Center for Compassionate Healthcare



“If I have learned anything, it is that we never know when, how, or whom a serious illness will strike.

If and when it does, each one of us wants not simply the best possible care for our body, but for our whole being.”

- Kenneth B. Schwartz, Schwartz Center Founder, 1995



Read the story that inspired our founding:

http://www.theschwartzcenter.org/members/media/patients_story.pdf



the schwartz center
FOR COMPASSIONATE HEALTHCARE

The Schwartz Center's 2030 Vision



- Expanding the reach & impact of our signature Schwartz Rounds program into new healthcare sectors & new parts of the world
- Strengthening our Community of Compassion Champions through expanded education, networking, & recognition offerings
- Developing new programs & partnerships in alignment with our Schwartz Compassionate Care Model

Schwartz Center Programs



Schwartz Rounds[®]



Stress First Aid



Compassion in Action Webinars and Conferences



Trainings & Workshops



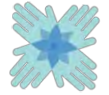
Community Connections



National Compassionate Caregivers of the Year[®] & Corman IMPACT Honors



Learning Objective #2



What is the Schwartz Center for **Compassionate** Healthcare?



What is **Compassion**?



Why does **Compassion** matter?



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How can **Compassion** transform organizations?



A Spectrum of Caring

Sympathy

- the feeling of pity & sorrow for someone else's misfortune

Empathy

- Recognizing & feeling distress/pain in others
- **Cognitive empathy**: Understanding through perspective-taking
- **Affective empathy**: Sharing another's emotional state

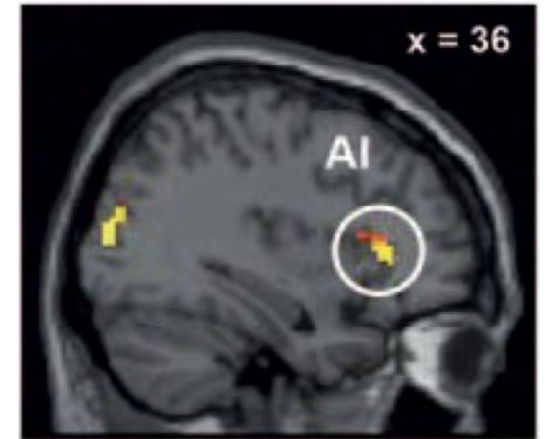
Compassion

- Recognizing **and** acting to relieve distress & suffering for others (patients & providers!)
- Includes efforts to ease mental & physical distress, anxiety, anger, grief, pain



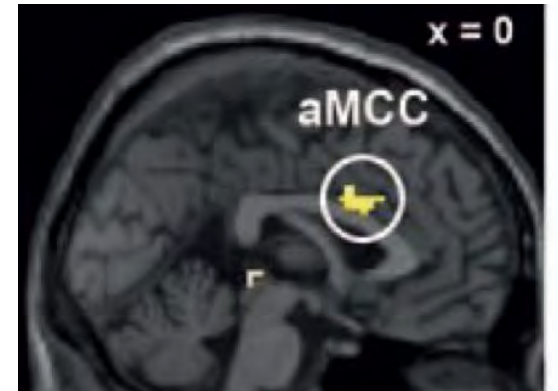
The Neuroscience of Empathy & Compassion

We all have the capacity & “hardwiring” for empathy & compassion – mediated by a core neural network involving anterior insula cortex, the anterior & middle cingulate cortex & the lateral prefrontal cortex

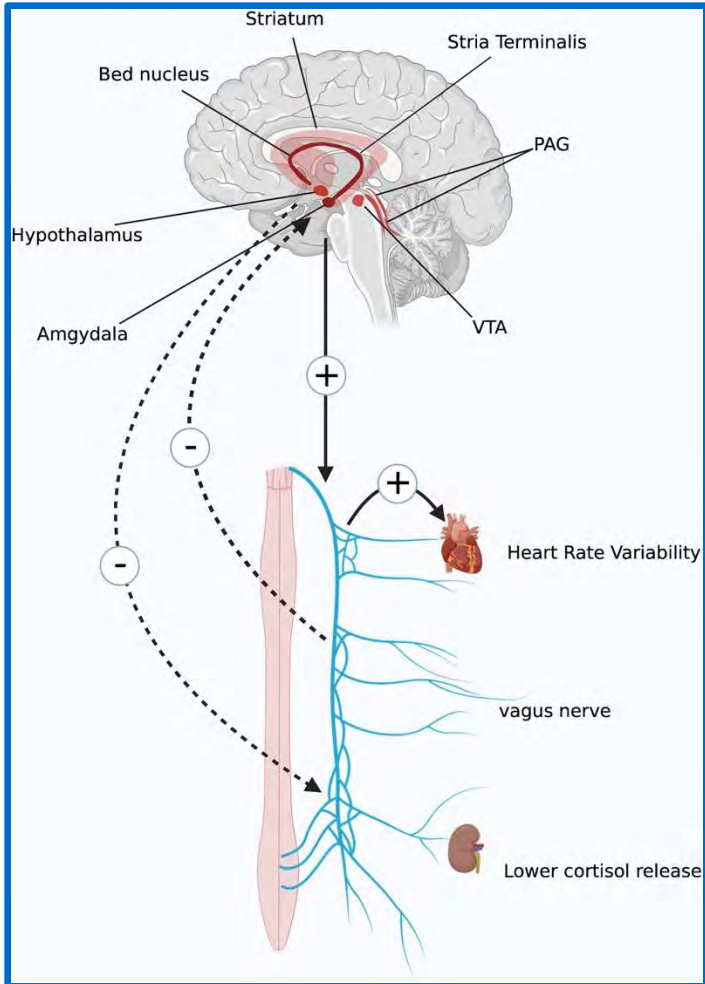


It can be taught – functional MRI studies have confirmed the positive impact of compassion training on these areas of the brain!

It can be strengthened – MRI studies show thickening of cortical grey matter in longitudinal training studies!



The Neuroscience of Empathy & Compassion



Forster & Kanske; International Journal of Psychophysiology; June 2022; 176: 100-107

Empathy for others' pain activates regions involved with having a direct pain experience

Compassion activates areas involved with positive affect & reward, & counteracts stress response

Compassion triggers self-soothing physiological changes & a sense of warmth, connection & reward

***"Burnout** occurs when you know what the patient needs...*



empathy pain center turned ON

but you are unable to meet their needs."



missing positive reward & affect

Alignment & Synergy with Other “Philosophies of Care”



Learning Objective #3



What is the Schwartz Center for **Compassionate** Healthcare?



What is **Compassion**?



Why does **Compassion** matter?



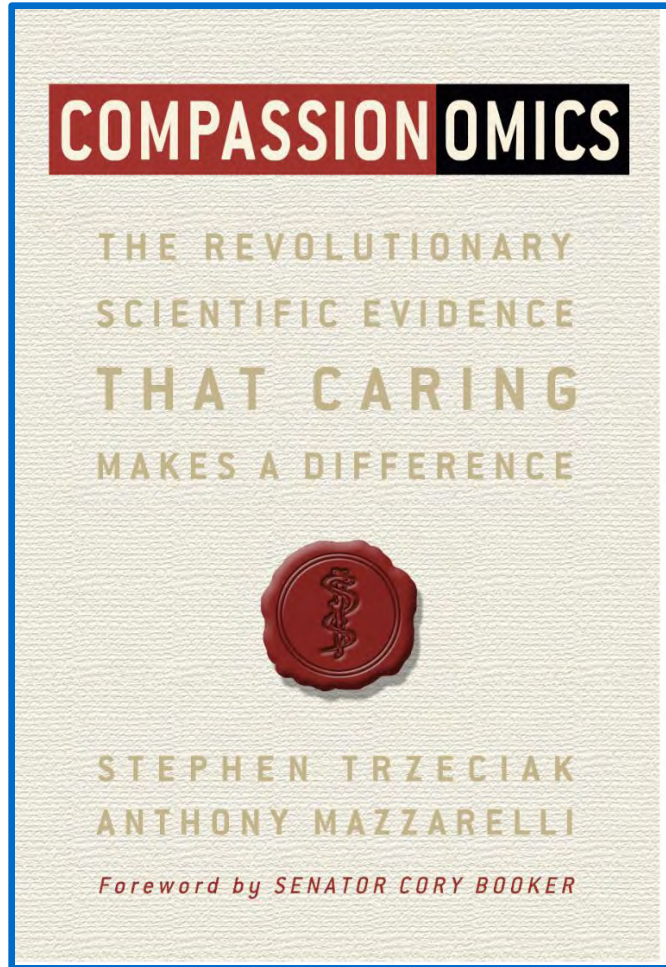
Can **Compassion** be increased?



How can **Compassion** transform organizations?



Compassion Makes Healthcare Better...



For Patients:

- Reduced pain & disability
- Less symptoms in cancer patients
- Less PTSD in patients with trauma
- Improved adherence
- Improved chronic disease outcomes
- Positive patient experiences

The Art & Science of Compassion!

For Providers:

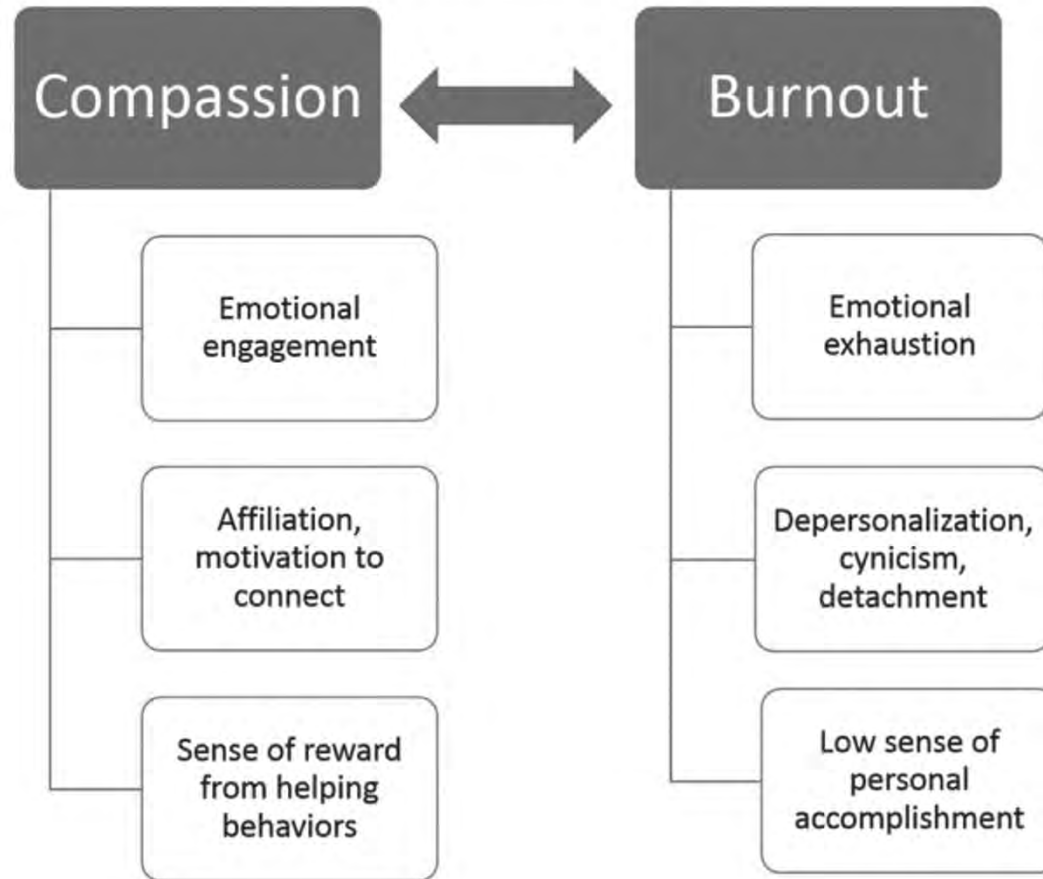
- Positive emotions
- Sense of reward & fulfillment
- Sense of affiliation & connection
- Improved professional quality of life
- Reduced turnover
- Improved productivity



The Connections Between Compassion & Burnout

FIGURE 1

Comparison of the Characteristics of Burnout and Compassion



- Compassion-related behaviors of nurses & physicians are inversely correlated with emotional exhaustion & depersonalization, and with lack of perceived organizational support
- The less support providers perceive, the more burnout they experience, and the less capacity they have to offer compassion to patients & families

Can Organizational Leaders Sustain Compassionate,
Patient-Centered Care & Mitigate Burnout?

Lown; 2019 Foundation of the ACHE

Linkages between Compassion → Burnout → Patient Safety

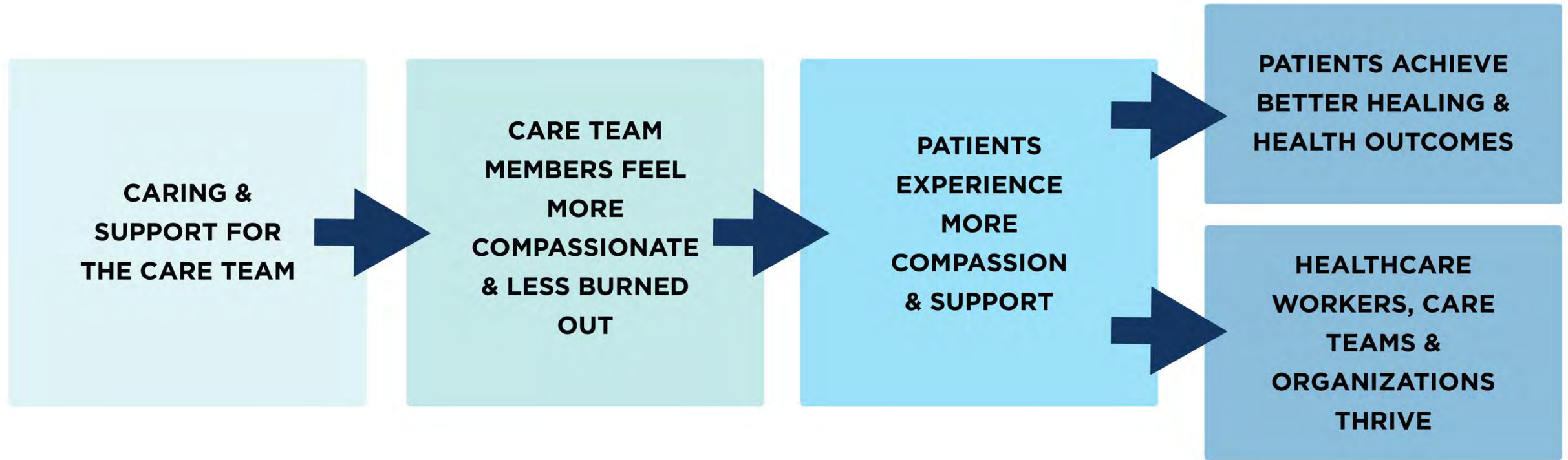
High Staff Burnout Rates are associated with:

- Higher turnover & less continuity of care
- Increased risk of patient safety incidents
- Increase in self-reported medical errors
- Increase in malpractice suits
- Reduced patient satisfaction
- Flawed diagnostic processes

Aiken LH, et al. JAMA Health Forum. 2023 Jul 7;4(7):e231809
Aiken LH, et al. BMJ Open. 2024 Feb 12;14(2):e079931
Owoc J, et al. J Patient Saf. 2022 Jan 1;18(1):e180-e188
Al-Ghunaim TA, et al. Am J Surg. 2022 Jul;224(1 Pt A):228-238
Tawfik DS, et al. Ann Intern Med. 2019 Oct 15;171(8):555-567
Sullivan EE, et al. Diagnosis (Berl).2023;10(3):309-312



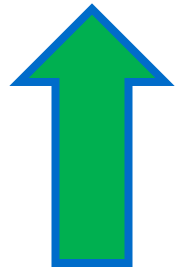
“The Theory of the Case” for Compassion



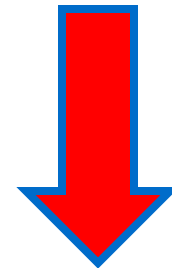


“Case for Compassion”

The Power of Compassion to Transform Organizations



- Better patient physical & mental health
- Patient satisfaction & loyalty
- Healthcare worker physical & mental health
- Teamwork & communication
- Organizational culture & employee engagement
- Operating revenues & margins



- Utilization of unnecessary resources & services
- Medical errors
- Malpractice claims
- Healthcare worker burnout
- Turnover & Lost MD Revenue
- Vacancies, Overtime, & Traveler Costs



Formulating the “Business Case” for Compassion

DECREASED COSTS

Reduced Burnout (estimated to cost US \$4.6 billion/yr)

- Reduced turnover & vacancy → Reduced coverage & replacement costs
 - Average cost of replacing a staff nurse ~\$52,350.
 - Average cost of replacing a physician \$500,000 – \$1,000,000
- Reduced mental/physical health costs and sick-time

Reduced Utilization of Diagnostic Tests, End-of-Life ICU Utilization, Readmissions

Reduced Adverse Events/Medical Errors (estimated to cost U.S. \$20 billion/yr)

- Fewer malpractice claims, lower premiums

INCREASED REVENUE

Increased Patient Revenue Growth from improved loyalty, and reputational benefits

Improved Caregiver Productivity

Improved Provider Retention



Learning Objective #4



What is the Schwartz Center for **Compassionate** Healthcare?



What is **Compassion**?



Why does **Compassion** matter?



Can **Compassion** be increased?



How can **Compassion** transform organizations?

Schwartz Rounds[®]

**An Evidence-Based Approach to
Advancing Compassion for Patients & Care Teams**



What Is the *Schwartz Rounds* Program?

- A regular open forum for multidisciplinary discussion of the psychosocial & emotional aspects of caregiving – both the challenges and the joys!
- Each session organized around a compelling patient story, or a theme with several patient stories
- Facilitated discussion incorporating trauma-informed care principles
- Both clinical & nonclinical panelists and participants
- Hour-long in-person, virtual, or hybrid format
- Organization-wide Rounds, but also team-based Rounds
 - clinical units, centers, depts, role-groups, learners





Sample Schwartz Rounds Topics

- *A Patient I Will Never Forget*
- *Caring for Patients with Homelessness*
- *Workplace Violence: When Hurting Patients Hurt Staff Members*
- *Moral Distress: When our Values are in Conflict*
- *Supporting Families through Loss of Baby*
- *Losing One of our Own*
- *The Power of Small Gestures*
- *Gratitude for the Coworker We Couldn't Do Without*
- *Humor in Healthcare*
- *Finding Joy & Awe in Our Work*

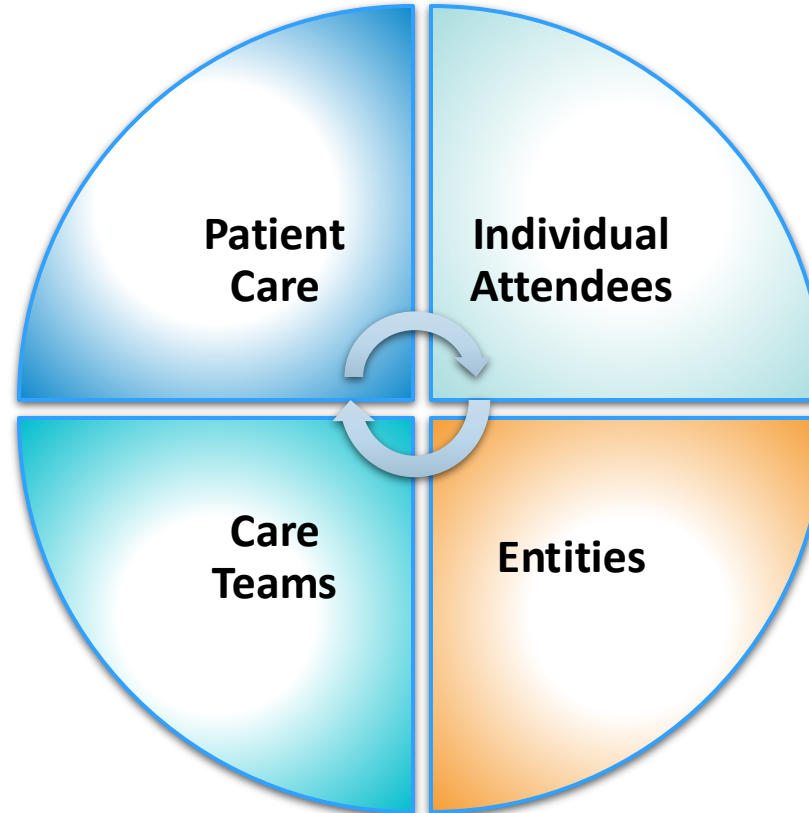


The Impact of Schwartz Rounds

100 Publications, 25 Years of Research

- Increased compassion & empathy
- Improved Insight into patient needs & concerns
- Increased sensitivity to illness impacts
- Better patient satisfaction

- Improved understanding of others' roles/perspectives
- Increased teamwork & communication
- Leadership engagement & flattening of hierarchy
- Sense of shared purpose



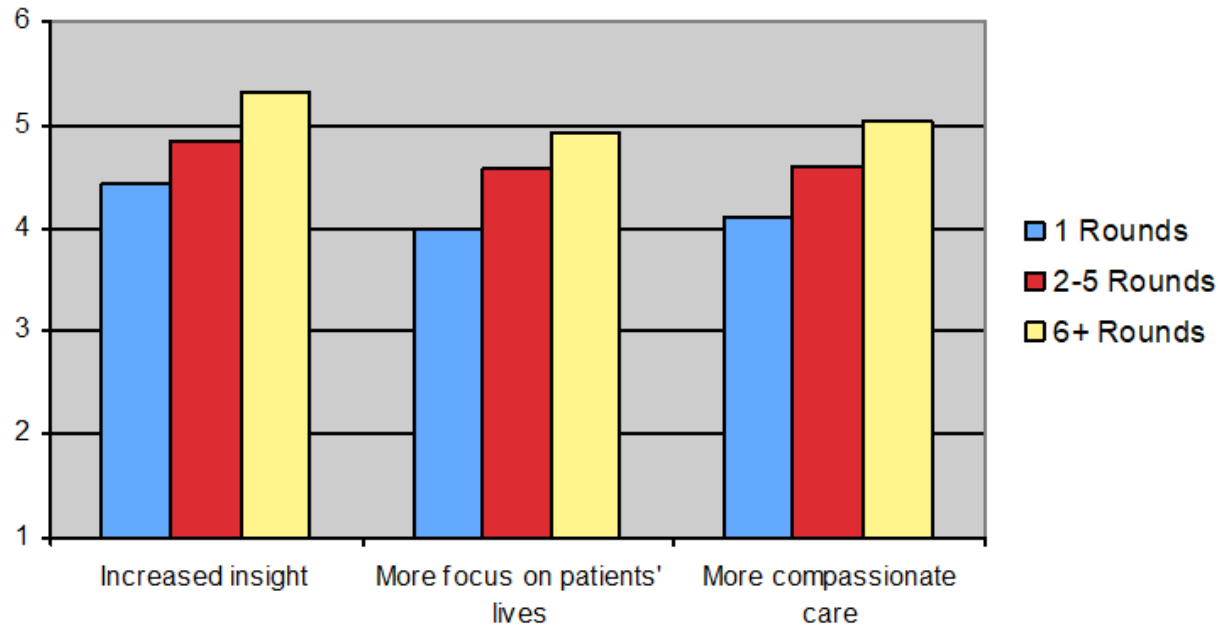
- 50% reduction in severe psychological distress
- Renewed passion & commitment
- Reduced mental health stigma
- Decreased isolation & stress
- Reduced moral distress

- Positive and supportive work & learning environment
- Bridging & de-siloing of depts
- Visible leadership support
- Changes in policies & practices
- Ripple effects on culture



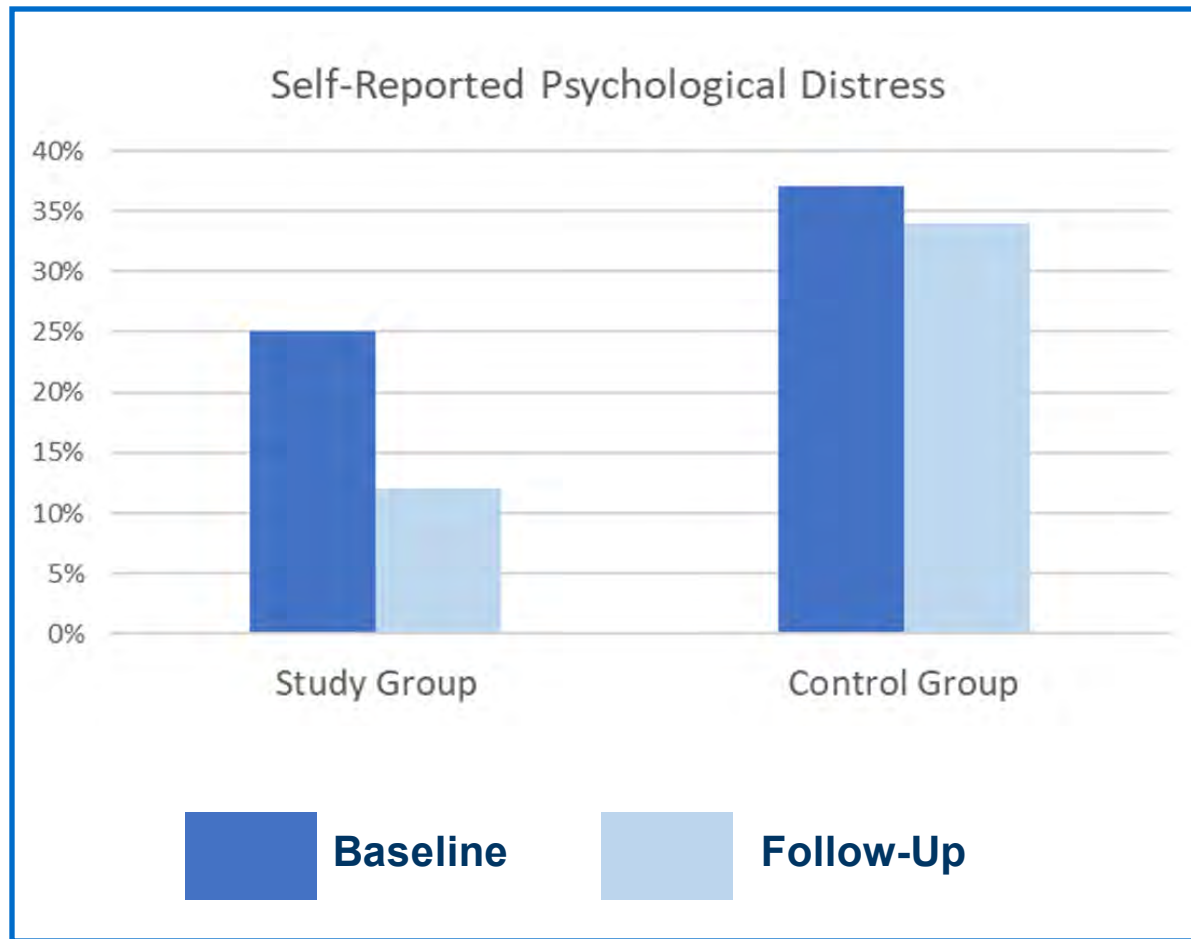
Schwartz Rounds Help Caregivers Provide More Compassionate Patient Care

Figure 2
Interactions with Patients by Level of Rounds Attendance



- **Caregiver-reported improvements:**
 - 90% reported more insight into non-clinical aspects of patient care
 - 88% feel more effective in responding to patients' socioemotional needs
 - 82% focus more on the effects of illness on patients and families
 - 82% provide more compassionate care
- A dose-response curve was also noted: *the more Rounds attended, the greater the effect*
- Similar impacts on teamwork and stress

Schwartz Rounds Significantly Reduce Psychological Distress



In a longitudinal comparison study, regular Schwartz Rounds attenders showed a **50% reduction in self-reported psychological distress** vs. 10% decrease in a comparison group

Likelihood of distress severe enough to require a clinical mental health intervention was **reduced by ~20%** in Schwartz Rounds attenders compared with non-attenders

Future Growth of the Schwartz Rounds Program



- ***Within Acute Care settings***
 - Team-based Rounds (Units, Depts, Role Groups)
 - Leadership Rounds
 - Rounds for Learners, Early Practitioners
- ***Within Adjacent Markets***
 - Insurance Company care management teams
 - School nurses
 - Hospice & Palliative Care sites
 - State-wide Nursing Collaborative: NJ-NEW
 - Retail Health
 - Health Education Schools
 - Veterinary Medicine!



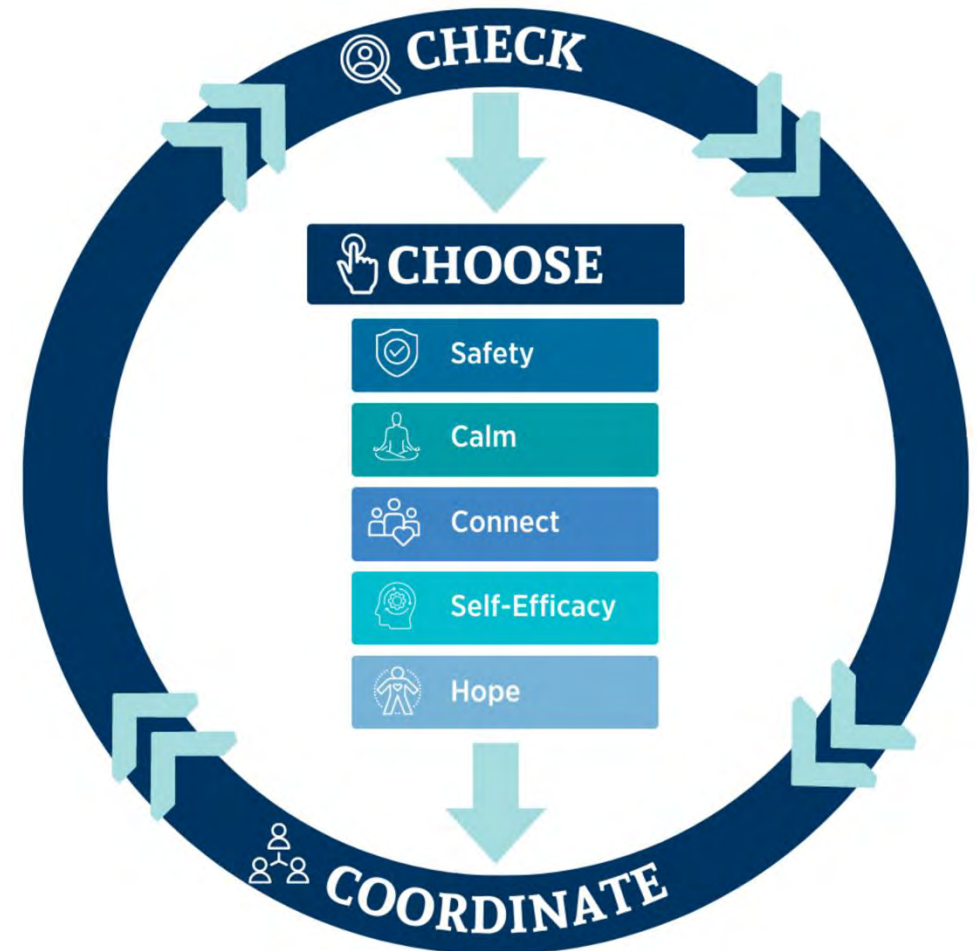
What is Stress First Aid?

A Framework for Psychological Self-Care & Peer Support

- Created at the National Center for PTSD for US military and first responders
- Adapted for our healthcare members with framework co-author Dr. Patricia Watson
- Flexible set of tools and resources for organizational dissemination
- Customizable: *NOT one size fits all*
- Includes key actions to identify & address early signs of stress reactions in yourself & others *in an ongoing way*



What is the Stress First Aid Model?



Learning Objective #5



What is the Schwartz Center for **Compassionate** Healthcare?



What is **Compassion**?



Why does **Compassion** matter?



Can **Compassion** be increased?

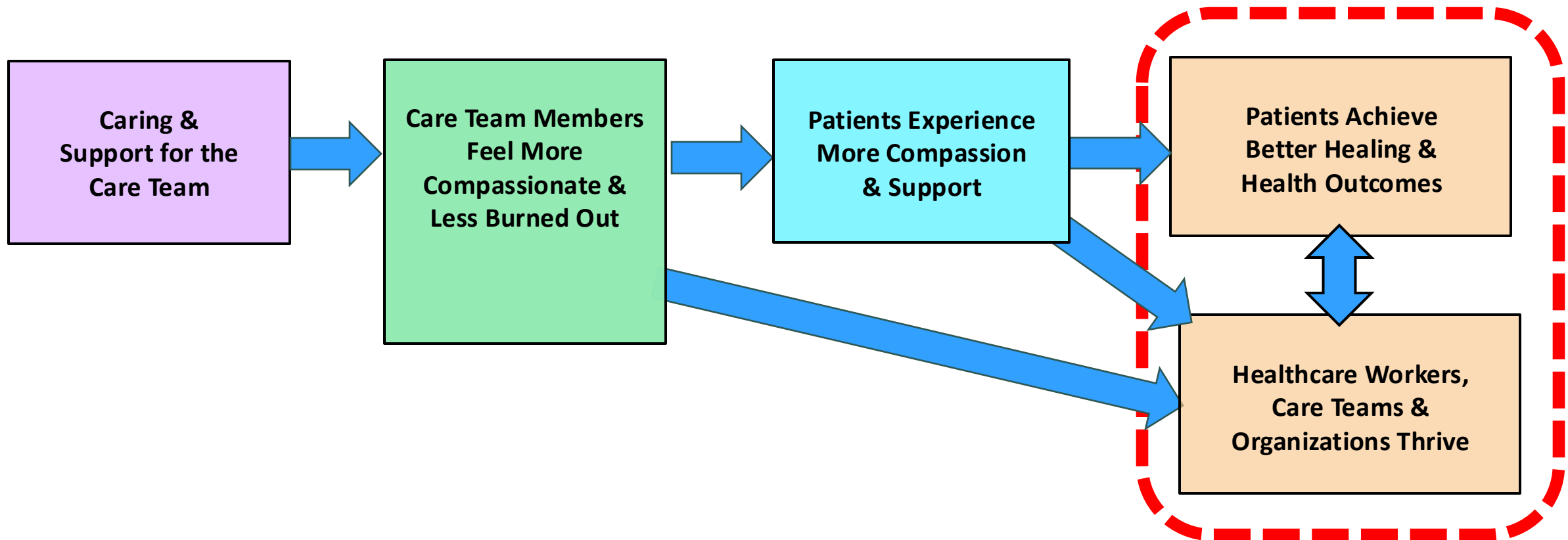


How can **Compassion** transform organizations?



“The Case for Compassion”

Unlocking the Power of Compassion to Transform Organizations



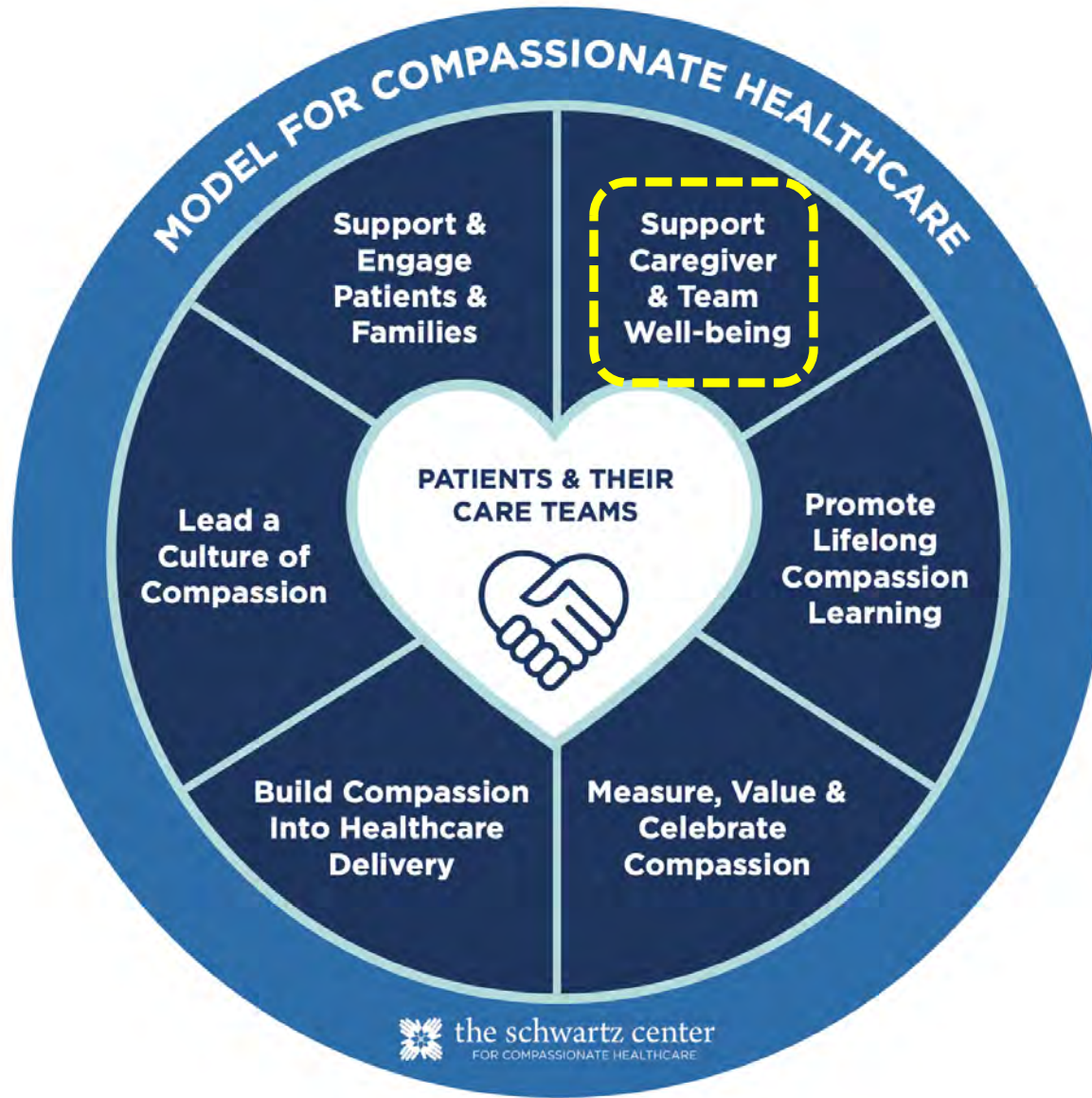
Schwartz Compassionate Care Model

Patients & Families

- Promote understanding of patient & family needs, concerns, goals, & preferences
- Adopt a holistic view of the “whole person”
- Provide emotional & psychological support
- Foster active engagement & partnership
- Include & support patient’s loved ones



Schwartz Compassionate Care Model



Caregivers & Care Teams

- Foster purpose & meaning in the work
- Reduce empathic distress & moral injury
- Offer peer support & social connection
- Enable teamwork & supportive teams
- Provide access & resources for mental health
- Address systemic drivers of burnout

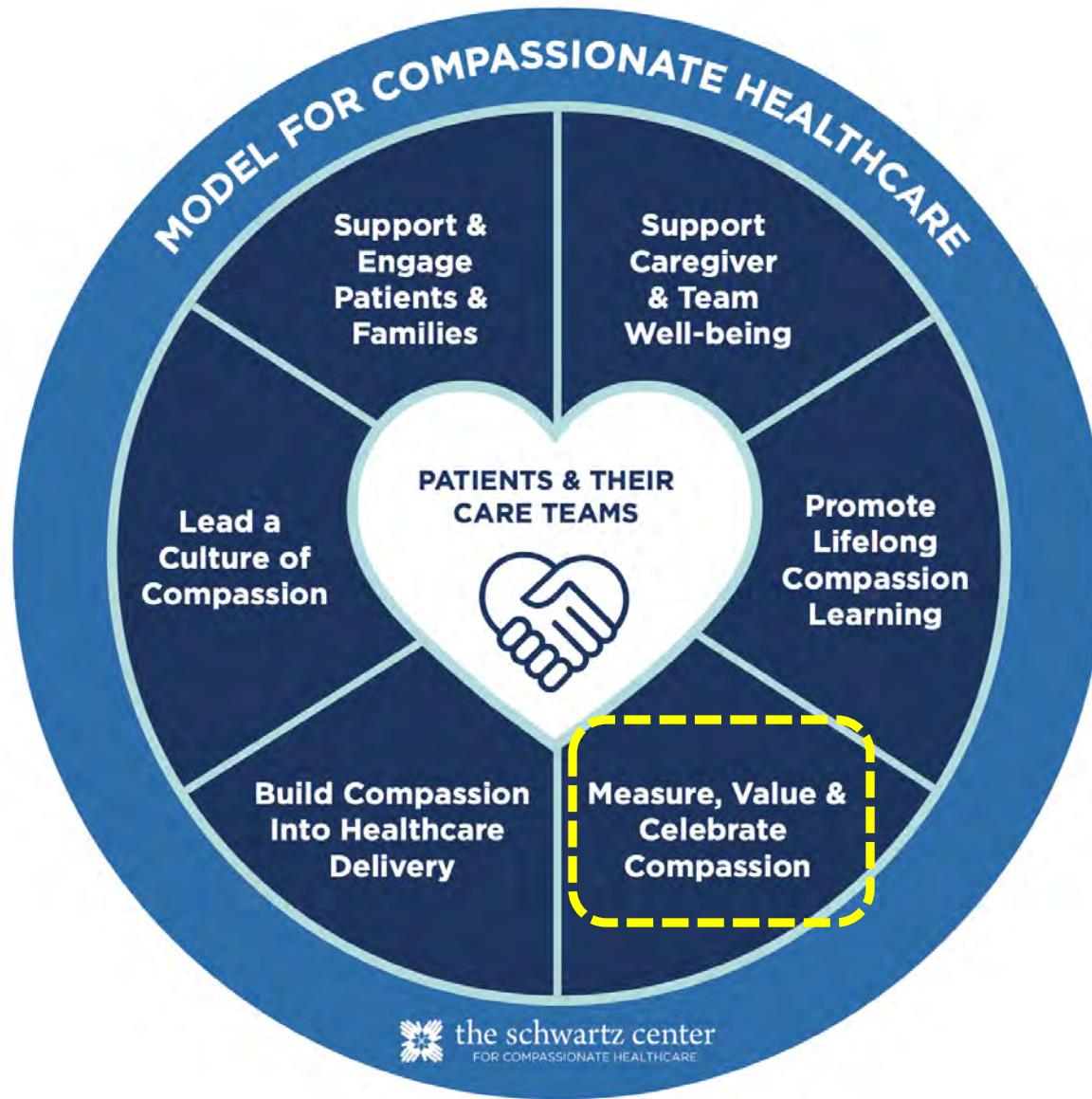
Schwartz Compassionate Care Model



Compassion Learning

- Provide compassion training to health professional learners, residents & faculty
- Integrate Patient-Clinician communication training & feedback into lifelong learning
- Offer reflective forums for storytelling & facilitated discussion

Schwartz Compassionate Care Model




Measure & Celebrate

- Assess patient & family perception of compassionate care
- Align incentives to reward compassion
- Provide meaningful recognition
- Celebrate & share best compassion practices
- Measure & track compassion “vital signs”

Organizational Compassion Practices Correlate with Patient Experience Ratings

Compassion Practices and HCAHPS:
Does Rewarding and Supporting
Workplace Compassion Influence
Patient Perceptions?

- *Recognition programs to reward employees for acts of caring shown to pts/families*
- *Recognition programs to reward employees for helping one another*
- *Compassionate caregiver employee awards*
- *Regular programs that provide pastoral care for employees*
- *Support sessions for departments/units dealing with crises, conflict, trauma, workplace stress*

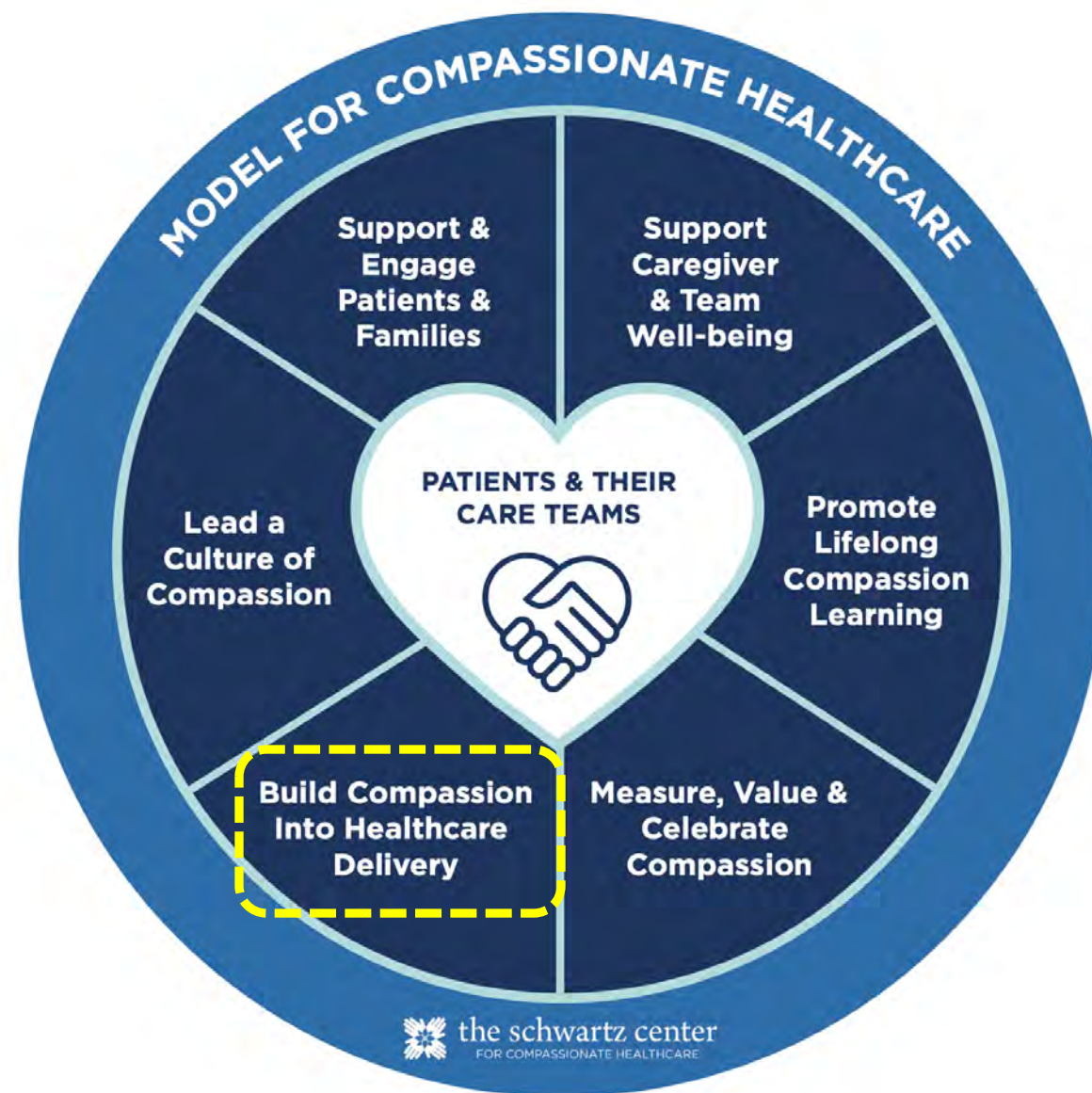


In all regressions, compassion practices remained positively associated with HCAHPS top-box ratings & likelihood to recommend, even after controlling for other known correlates (e.g., hospital size, location, teaching, for-profit status, staffing levels, Magnet, CMS quality metrics)

Schwartz Compassionate Care Model

Healthcare Delivery

- Change systems, processes, policies & practices to foster compassion
- Enhance patient-caregiver connection & understanding of needs/goals
- Improve transitions & care handoffs
- Evaluate all innovations & new models of care to assess +/- impacts on compassion



Will Compassion Survive – or Thrive – in the AI Era?

JAMA Internal Medicine | [Original Investigation](#)

Comparing Physician and Artificial Intelligence Chatbot Responses to Patient Questions Posted to a Public Social Media Forum

John W. Ayers, PhD, MA; Adam Poliak, PhD; Mark Dredze, PhD; Eric C. Leas, PhD, MPH; Zechariah Zhu, BS; Jessica B. Kelley, MSN; Dennis J. Faix, MD; Aaron M. Goodman, MD; Christopher A. Longhurst, MD, MS; Michael Hogarth, MD; Davey M. Smith, MD, MAS

JAMA Intern Med; Published Online: April 28, 2023

← Invited Commentary
page 596

“The chatbot responses were preferred over physician responses and rated significantly higher for both quality and empathy.”

Compassionate Care with Autonomous AI Humanoid Robots in Future Healthcare Delivery: A Multisensory Simulation of Next-Generation Models

Biomimetics **2024**, 9(11), 687; <https://doi.org/10.3390/biomimetics9110687>

The integration of AI and robotics in healthcare raises concerns, and additional issues regarding autonomous systems are anticipated. Effective communication is crucial for robots to be seen as “caring”, necessitating advanced mechatronic design and natural language processing (NLP). This paper examines the potential of humanoid robots to autonomously replicate compassionate care. The study employs computational simulations using mathematical

Compassionate Care ≈ Autonomous AI Humanoid Robots

Deeply emulating the human caring process from a nurse-led conceptualization of futurism in healthcare and beyond Earth's frontiers, beginning in



Schwartz Compassionate Care Model

Leadership & Culture

- Invest in compassion-building
- Promote compassionate, relational leadership
- Build trust via integrity, presence & transparency
- Advance diversity, equity & inclusion
- Promote physical & psychologic safety



The Importance of Organizational & Leadership Compassion

Caregivers' perceptions of the extent to which their hospitals value compassion drive their own compassion and their organizational commitment

- Healthcare workers with higher perceived hospital compassion:
 - ✓ Rated their individual compassion more highly
 - ✓ Rated their healthcare team's level of compassion more highly
 - ✓ Rated their commitment to their hospitals more highly
 - ✓ Were less likely to report high staff turnover

THE SCHWARTZ CENTER'S MODEL FOR COMPASSIONATE HEALTHCARE

Compassionate healthcare isn't just an ideal—it's essential for patients, families, and their care teams to thrive. Drawing on decades of research, we've identified the key drivers of compassionate healthcare that will enable healthcare organizations and their leaders to advance an institutional culture of compassion.

This framework unites patient and family-centered care with caregiver and care team well-being, education, and recognition, guided by leaders who are committed to helping compassion thrive. Healthcare organizations must embed compassion in all aspects of training, research, care delivery and organizational culture to deliver care that is safe, effective, equitable, and compassionate.

Explore the key domains on pages 2-5, and the summary of actionable leadership strategies to embed compassion in your organization on page 6.



Please see more details on page 6.

1

Schwartz Compassionate Care Model

2. Support Caregiver & Team Well-being

Healthcare organizations will prioritize and support caregiver and care team well-being and address systemic factors that contribute to burnout.

Healthcare professionals are called to serve and heal, yet they face challenging emotional and administrative burdens. Constant exposure to pain, grief, and trauma puts them at risk for traumatic stress injuries, empathic distress and poor mental health. Stigma often prevents many caregivers from receiving vital mental health support. Leaders can address this by normalizing and increasing access to mental and behavioral healthcare, and by eliminating intrusive disclosure requirements from applications for licensure and clinical privileges.

Caregivers also face inequities, onerous processes and policies, technological demands, and constrained resources, all of which increase their risk for burnout and moral distress, and an associated erosion of compassion. Solutions must address the systemic and administrative barriers that drive burnout and impair caregivers' ability to provide compassionate care.

Healing happens through community. Caregivers need opportunities for human connection, access to peer support, and psychologically safe spaces to reflect and share their experiences with colleagues.

3. Promote Lifelong Compassion Learning

Health professional trainees, clinicians, and frontline staff will continuously enhance their knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable them to model and provide compassionate care.

Research shows that compassion is innate and hardwired in the human brain, and that it can also be strengthened and cultivated with education, practice, and supportive systems.

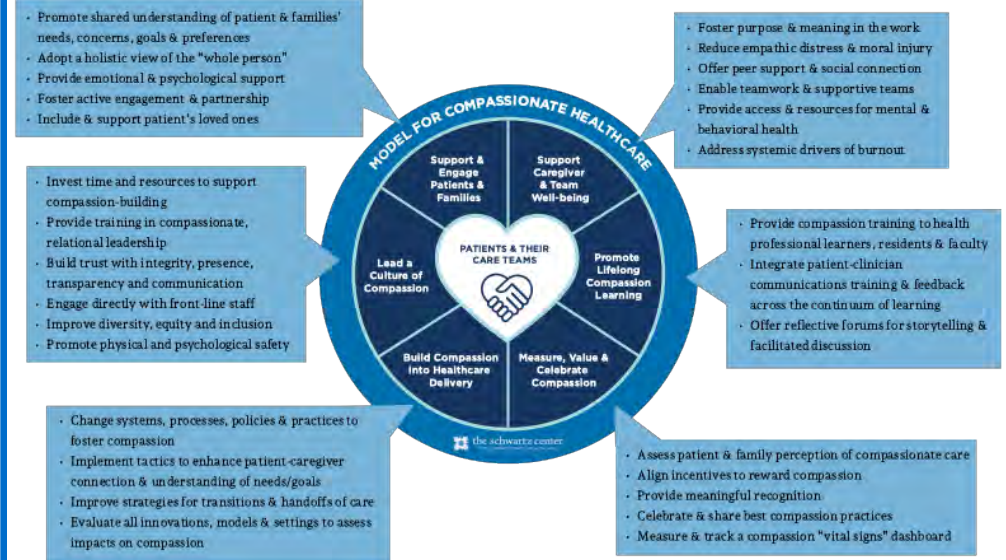
While most health professional schools offer courses on the patient-clinician relationship, communication skills, and social issues, the actual modeling and assessment of compassion remains inconsistent. Students and trainees often suffer from traumatic stress and burnout while caring for patients—often at rates that exceed that of their teachers. They may also witness examples of uncaring behavior by role models that inhibits the development of compassionate practices.

Educators should integrate the knowledge and skills required to provide compassionate care across all years and sites of education, training, and practice, including in faculty development and mentoring offerings. Training and feedback in effective interpersonal and communication skills are essential to achieve these goals. Students and trainees will also benefit from opportunities to develop the skills of self-reflection and to participate in discussions about the emotional and psychological impact of caring for patients and their families.



BUILDING COMPASSIONATE HEALTHCARE: A LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

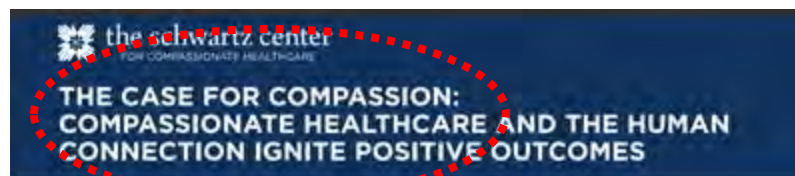
Healthcare organizations thrive when they build cultures of compassion. This framework, grounded in evidence-based research, outlines essential elements for healthcare leaders to foster compassionate care delivery. Leaders can create environments where both patients and caregivers flourish by aligning organizational systems with care team support and excellent patient and family experiences.



Read & Learn More at:
<https://www.theschwartzcenter.org/care-model/>

The Case for Compassion & Schwartz Rounds Research Summaries

<https://www.theschwartzcenter.org/evidence-in-action/>



WHAT IS COMPASSIONATE CARE?

Compassion means not only understanding and feeling another's pain to help them.^{1,2} While empathy means feeling or cognitively understanding and perspectives, compassion goes further by motivating behavior.

For our purposes, compassionate care means:

- Recognizing and acknowledging a person's suffering, distress, and needs
- Taking active steps to address both their physical and emotional needs
- Providing genuine human connection throughout their healthcare journey

WHY DOES COMPASSIONATE CARE MATTER?

Healthcare is inherently complex, uncertain, and ever-changing, and burnout among healthcare workers (HCW) exacerbated by the COVID-19 aspect of healthcare remains constant: **patients and families want they are vulnerable, ill and suffering, and that is what clinicians**

Our nationally representative surveys reveal:

- Both patients and clinicians believe compassion is vitally important to treatment and that good communication and emotional support, whether a patient lives or dies.^{7,8}
- 85% of patients reported that compassion was very important to their healthcare experience.
- Both patients and clinicians report that changes in the healthcare system receive and provide the kind of compassionate care and support.

Compassion and the human connection are essential not only for patients to improve health and organizational profitability.



the schwartz center FOR COMPASSIONATE HEALTHCARE SCHWARTZ ROUNDS® RESEARCH	
More than 100 peer-reviewed and descriptive studies have documented the benefits of the Schwartz Rounds program for over 25 years.	
What is the Schwartz Rounds program? The Schwartz Rounds program provides a regular open forum for a multidisciplinary discussion of the psychosocial and emotional aspects of working in healthcare. Each session is organized around a compelling theme or patient story, and includes both clinical and nonclinical panelists and participants.	
Who benefits from participation in the Schwartz Rounds? The program is offered in more than 900 healthcare organizations throughout the U.S., Canada, the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand. It has proven to be highly effective across diverse healthcare and educational settings, among both clinical and non-clinical workers in various disciplines, specialties, roles, and levels of training.	
What does the research on Schwartz Rounds show? Research shows that the Schwartz Rounds program is beneficial for patients, individual caregivers, care teams, and healthcare organizations. Researchers have found that the impact of the Schwartz Rounds is cumulative: the more sessions attended, the greater its impact on individuals, patient care, and teams.	
Impact on individual attendees <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduced psychological distress in 50% compared to non-attendees• Reduced moral distress reported by 50% of physicians and 35.5% of nurses• Increased confidence in handling sensitive issues and work stress• Decreased isolation and stress, and increased feelings of support and connectedness• Renewed commitment and passion for work, and an increased sense of growth and pride• Reduced mental health stigma because the Schwartz Rounds are seen as a safe way to share the emotional impact of work compared to traditional alternatives.	Impact on patient care <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased compassion and empathy reported by more than 85% of respondents who said the Schwartz Rounds increased their understanding and practice of empathy with patients• Improved insights from 80% of attendees who reported a greater understanding of the psychosocial and emotional aspects of patient care• Enhanced confidence in responding to patients' needs as attendees gained insights into patients' and families' experiences and how illness affects their lives• Improved patient and staff satisfaction in one study, consistent with other research showing that compassion practices can improve HCAHPS ratings.
Impact on care teams <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved teamwork and communication among colleagues, including more openness to offering and receiving support, and a flattening of hierarchy• Increased understanding of others' roles and perspectives and more inclusion of non-clinical staff• Increased engagement with leadership and more personal conversations between staff and managers	Impact on organizations <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved work environment from supporting caregiver emotions and creating safe spaces for reflection• Enhanced collaboration across disciplines and departments and building of interdisciplinary bridges• Increased sense of leadership support, with staff feeling more valued and that their work is appreciated



SEARCH MEDIA CENTER CONTACT US MEMBERSHIP DONATE
ABOUT JOIN SUPPORT PROGRAMS RESOURCES EVENTS

Evidence in Action: Making the Connection Between the Schwartz Rounds Program, Compassion, and Better Healthcare

The Schwartz Center for Compassionate Healthcare was founded on the belief that **compassionate care is essential to healthcare quality and outcomes**.

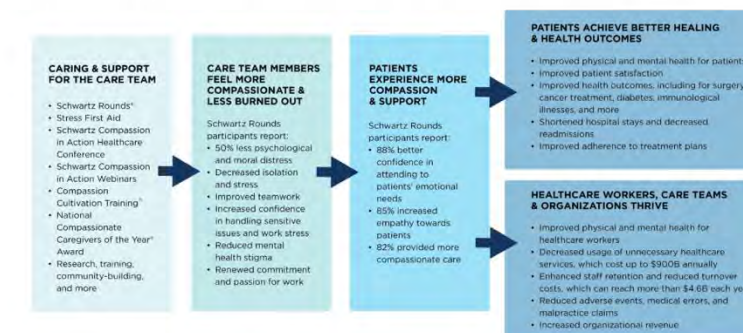
Research shows that compassion improves patient care and helps healthcare workers feel more fulfilled in their roles, but many organizations struggle with how to actually build more compassionate cultures. Our Schwartz Rounds program, where healthcare teams gather to share the emotional side of their work, provides a concrete solution to this problem.



We know that healthcare is about more than medical expertise—it's about human connection.

The extensive research on the Schwartz Rounds program connects with what we know about compassion in healthcare more broadly, providing practical insights for anyone looking to create more supportive, caring healthcare environments — for healthcare workers, patients, families, organizations, and communities.

Our program gives healthcare leaders a blueprint to improve staff well-being, the patient experience, organizational culture, and operational efficiency — making compassionate care not just a moral imperative but a strategic advantage in today's challenging healthcare environment.



The Schwartz Rounds Program: Evidence-Based Impact

The Schwartz Rounds program provides a regular open forum for a multidisciplinary discussion of the psychosocial and emotional aspects of working in healthcare. Each session is organized around a compelling theme or patient story, and includes both clinical and nonclinical panelists and participants.

The Power of “Exquisite Moments of Compassion”



Kenneth B. Schwartz & family; 1995

“I have been the recipient of an extraordinary array of human and humane responses to my plight. These acts of kindness – the simple human touch from my caregivers – have made the unbearable bearable.”

30 *yrs* **CHAMPIONS**
of COMPASSIONATE CARE

