
Learning Unit 21:

Care for the caregiver

**BOTH
TRACKS**



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Introduction

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You have learnt how to be a good counsellor and a good caregiver to others. But **who will** be taking care of **you**? This study unit will *not* be about others. It will be about *you*. I believe that you can take care of others only if you first of all take proper care of yourself. You will soon discover why.

Key questions

Use the following questions as pointers to ensure that you retain your focus on the important issues in this learning unit:

- Are caregivers totally stressed out, and why?
- How should I take care of myself as a caregiver?

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Key concepts

While working your way through this study unit, look out for the following key terms.

<u>Occupational stress</u>	<u>Boundary problems</u>
<u>Burnout</u>	<u>Grief and bereavement overload</u>
<u>Depersonalisation</u>	<u>Supervision</u>
<u>Over-identification</u>	<u>Mentoring</u>

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The stress experienced by caregivers

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Before we take you to the prescribed book, do the following activity and tell your story as caregiver.

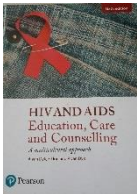



ACTIVITY 21.1: MY STORY AS A CAREGIVER

This activity will give you the opportunity to write your life story as a caregiver. Caregiving includes not only professional caregiving, but also taking care of loved ones. Go to [Activity 21.1](#).

Feedback: After doing this activity, you are probably wondering if the stress that you experience is normal or not, if you are doing enough to alleviate it, and what you can do to care more for yourself. This learning unit is about caring for yourself as a caregiver. Keep your story as a caregiver at hand because we will come back to it.

Go to your prescribed book to read more about stress and to see how other caregivers are doing.

<p>Study</p> 	<p>Prescribed book: pp. 627-633</p> <p>Introduction: Read about how Aids has changed the medical landscape completely and about the tremendous burden it has placed on the shoulders of caregivers – especially in sub-Saharan Africa.</p> <p>Section 21.1: Stress, compassion fatigue and burnout. Make sure that you can define these concepts and discuss the effect of stress on the caregiver. How does stress and burnout in the workplace and in the personal lives of caregivers manifest?</p> <p>It is important that you know the difference between stress and burnout. Burnout can be seen as the end stage of chronic stress, and it is a very serious condition which is hard to treat. It is in your own best interest to recognise stress and burnout in yourself and to do something about it immediately. Watch this video http://goo.gl/Kn8S6f on caregiver burnout.</p> <p>Section 21.2: Factors associated with occupational stress in the Aids field. Make your own list of factors that cause stress in a caregiver’s life. Compare your list to the list in the prescribed book.</p>	
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The following activity will give you the opportunity to talk about the stress factors in your life as a caregiver.

ACTIVITY 21.2 – STRESS FACTORS IN MY LIFE AS A CAREGIVER

Write an essay about the stress factors in your life and fill in a stress and burnout checklist to measure your stress levels. Go to [Activity 21.2](#).

Feedback: You are probably wondering why I gave you such a stressful activity to do! Well, you have to know the enemy to fight the enemy. As caregivers, we are very aware of the feelings and emotions of our clients and patients, but when it comes to ourselves, we are often clueless. Awareness of the stress factors in our lives and how our bodies react to them (symptoms) is the first step in DOING something about our stress. Although we often cannot change the *stress factors* in our lives, it is possible to change the way *we cope* with these stress factors. Caregivers are also notorious for *giving* help without being able to *ask* for it. Try to change this and get some support for yourself as well. Let's now talk about coping and self-care.

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How to take care of the self

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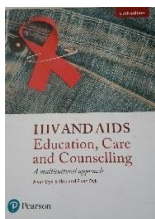
In your *story as a caregiver* (Activity 21.1), you wrote what support you receive from others, and what you do for yourself to better cope with stress. Read more in the prescribed book about the skills that may help caregivers and counsellors to cope with the pressure of working with people living with HIV and Aids. Also read what the workplace can do to support caregivers.



Look at this YouTube video <http://goo.gl/aM9DQz> on “What is self-care?” and then go to your prescribed book.



Study



Prescribed book: pp. 633-642

Section 21.3: Care for the self. While you read through this section, make it personal and do the following:

- Re-evaluate your own performance expectations and goals.
- Start developing an acute self-awareness by asking yourself why you are in the helping profession in the first place. Make a list of the things you do to take care of yourself.
- Make a list of your support systems, both personal and professional.

Look at this YouTube video <http://goo.gl/QSDcNN> on care for the caregiver.



Section 21.4: Organisational support. Read this section and do the following:

- Make a list of all the things your employer or manager does to create a supportive working environment for you to work in. What more could your employer do?
- Discuss the role of a *mentor* in supporting caregivers.
- Discuss the role of emotional support and therapeutic counselling in the workplace. Describe your understanding of the word “coping”.
- Give guidelines that will help caregivers to cope better with their work stress.
- What role does ongoing training play in your life?

Now that you know, in theory, how to care for yourself as a caregiver, watch this self-care video <http://goo.gl/4liyp6> and do the following activity.



ACTIVITY 21.3: MY SELF-CARE PLAN

Draw up a self-care plan. Go to [Activity 21.3](#).

Feedback: Working in the Aids field places a tremendous strain on caregivers, and many caregivers leave the profession because they cannot cope or because they suffer from burnout. I cannot emphasise enough the importance of having a self-care plan. As I said before: you can give quality time to those in your care only if you care for yourself in the first place. In one of our counselling skills workshops, an aeroplane analogy was used to explain this: When the flight attendants explain the safety procedures to passengers, one of the things they do is to show you how to use your oxygen mask. They instruct you to put the oxygen mask on your own face first, and then to assist young children and elderly people with their face masks. If you do not take care of yourself first (by putting on your oxygen mask), you will not be able to assist those who need your help and care.

You are now finished with this learning unit. Click on [Assessment](#) to do some self-assessment questions.

Assessment

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Study reflection

After completing Learning Unit 21 (Care for the caregiver), you should have acquired the following knowledge and understanding and be able to:

- identify stress factors in your life (both personal and work related).
- know your body to know when you are stressed (symptoms of stress).

Self-Assessment 21



Now is the time to pause briefly and to assess whether you have acquired the necessary knowledge and skills. Click on [Self-Assessment 21](#) to do a few questions on this learning unit.

Please note that these self-assessment questions do not contribute to your year mark or to your admission to the exams. The feedback to the questions will be given to you immediately after you have completed each question.

You are now finished with the assessment. Go to Learning Unit 22.

APPENDICES

- Activities
- Self-Assessments
- Glossary

ACTIVITY 21.1 - MY STORY AS A CAREGIVER

Write the following heading on a piece of paper, or blog about it:

“My story as a caregiver”

Now do the following:

1. Write your life story as a caregiver. Who do you take care of? Your story should include your life as a caregiver on a professional level (e.g. patients, clients, school children, employees, colleagues), but also on a personal level (e.g. partner, children, parents, family, friends). Care involves all types of care, such as emotional care, physical care, financial care and psychological care.
2. Being a caregiver can sometimes cause a lot of stress, especially if you work in the HIV and Aids context. If you think of your stress levels on a scale of 0 to 10 (with 0 = no stress and 10 = extreme stress), where would you place yourself on the following scale?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. What are the sources of your stress? In other words, what are the factors that contribute to your stress? (Divide your stress factors into personal stress factors and work-related stress factors.)
4. How do you know that you are stressed? In other words, what symptoms of stress are you experiencing?
5. What support do you receive from others to alleviate your stress? Divide the support you receive into personal support (from loved ones and friends) and organisational or employer support.
6. What do you do personally to alleviate your stress and to care for yourself?

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ACTIVITY 21.2 - STRESS FACTORS IN MY LIFE AS A CAREGIVER

Go back to your own story as a caregiver and do the following activity.

1. Write an essay about the stress factors in your life. If you care for patients with Aids, concentrate on the factors involved in your work as an Aids caregiver (include stressors in your personal life that can be linked to your work as an Aids caregiver). Compare your stress factors to the stress factors experienced by other caregivers as discussed in section 21.3 in your prescribed book. Comment on the similarities and differences. If you do not work in the Aids field, write about the stress factors you experience in your work. Any type of work brings about its own stress factors.
2. Fill in the stress and burnout checklist in your prescribed book to evaluate your own stress levels (Enrichment box: Stress and Burnout Checklist). Are your stress levels low or high? Look back at the stress scale that you filled in for activity 21.1(2). Now that you know what the symptoms of stress are, and what to look out for, do you want to adjust the scale in activity 21.1, or was your gut feeling about your stress levels about right?
3. Do you ever ask for help if you feel that you cannot cope? If yes, who do you ask for help?

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ACTIVITY 21.3 - MY SELF-CARE PLAN

Give your imagination wings and make a list of all the things that you would love to do if you had limitless time. Think big and small. Your wish list may include anything from “New Year’s Eve in Cape Town” to “30 minutes every day to work in my garden”. The only conditions for your wish list are that your wishes (a) may not be work-related, and (b) must be something that you would do for yourself – but you may, of course, do it together with somebody else.

Instructions:

1. Choose the one thing on your list that is the most possible to carry out now. Fix a date in your diary to do this activity or have this experience and keep that date! Write a report about how it felt to do something nice for yourself. (Fight the typical caregiver feeling of guilt!) Do this on a regular basis to spoil yourself a bit. You can also fix a date in your diary for one of your long-term dreams to look forward to.
2. Make a self-care list to use at work. Stick this list somewhere in your office or in your locker where you can see it. Refer to your list regularly to see if you are sticking to your care plan. The type of plans on your list will depend on the type of work you do, and they must obviously be realistic.
3. If you work in a very stressful situation, start a peer-support group. Use the tips in your prescribed book, and remember to ask permission and support from your employer. Keep patient/client confidentiality in mind at all times and make sure that the group is about support and professional venting, and not about gossiping!
4. Set aside 10 minutes a day to do the visualisation exercise (or imagery) described in your prescribed book. You will literally feel the tension flow from your body and you will feel refreshed and ready to go on with your day.
5. After implementing your self-care plan for at least a month, go back to your stress scale in activity 21.1(2). Mark your stress levels on this scale (between 0 and 10) to see if there is any improvement. If not, revise your self-care plan.

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SELF ASSESSMENT 21

Question 1

Define the term “occupational stress”.

Question 2

What does the term “burnout” mean?

Question 3

Which of the following strategies will prevent occupational stress and burnout among Aids caregivers?

1. Over-identification and self-care
2. Professional and role issues
3. Over-involvement and boundary problems
4. Stress reduction and coping skills

Question 4

Is the following statement true or false? “Training does not play a role in the management of stress and burnout in caregivers.”

[\[FEEDBACK\]](#)

FEEDBACK 21

Feedback Question 1

Occupational stress is the perception of being unable to cope with an internal or external expectation or demand in the workplace.

Feedback Question 2

Burnout is the end stage of a chronic process of deterioration and frustration due to long-term emotional and interpersonal stressors.

Feedback Question 3

The correct answer is “stress reduction and coping skills” (alternative 4).

Feedback Question 4

Training plays an important role in the management of stress and burnout in caregivers. The statement is therefore false.

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Glossary

Occupational stress

It is the perception of being unable to cope with an internal or external expectation or demand in the workplace.

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Burnout

The end stage of a chronic process of deterioration and frustration due to long-term emotional and interpersonal stressors (often experienced in work situations).

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Depersonalisation

An emotional dissociative disorder in which there is loss of contact with your own personal reality or identity, accompanied by feelings of unreality and strangeness.

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Over-identification

The situation in which the caregiver can no longer keep his/her life apart from that of the patient and in which he/she identifies so completely with the pain of the patient that he/she can no longer be objective. The caregiver then experiences so much stress him/herself that he/she can no longer be of assistance to the patient.

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Boundary problems

The situation in which caregivers can no longer put boundaries in place between themselves and the patients and, consequently, become over-involved in their patients' lives.

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Grief and bereavement overload

Grief is a natural response to loss, it is the emotional suffering one feels when something or someone the individual loves is taken away. Bereavement overload is the experience of suffering too many deaths within a certain period of time and not being allowed the opportunity or time to grieve.

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Supervision

Supervisors provide guidance and support to caregivers (also see Mentoring). However, the hierarchical, managerial and evaluative nature of supervision often prevents caregivers from openly sharing their feelings and anxieties.

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Mentoring

The process by which a counsellor receives guidance and support from an experienced colleague or professional person. This helps the counsellor to develop his/her skills and to grow in self-awareness.

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