Hello! Our goal for next two meetings is to better understand and recognize psychological distress—especially when it takes the form of burnout or compassion fatigue—and to discuss healthy tools and actions for coping. I’d like to start by providing definitions of burnout, compassion fatigue and depression so we’re all on the same page as we discuss this topic.

**Burnout** results from stresses in the work environment, such as problems with coworkers or superiors. Burnout has three primary characteristics: emotional exhaustion, alienation from job-related activities and reduced performance.

**Compassion fatigue** is an emotional and physical burden created by the trauma of helping others in distress, which leads to a reduced capacity for empathy toward suffering in the future. Burnout springs from where you work, and compassion fatigue is associated with the work you do.

When we talk about depression, it’s important to note that compassion fatigue and burnout are not forms of depression, but they can lead to and coexist with it. Some characteristics of major depression, as listed by the Mayo Clinic, include: feelings of sadness/emptiness, angry outbursts (even over small matters), loss of interest in normal activities, sleep disturbances (sleeping too much or too little), fixating on past failures and frequent thoughts of death or suicide.

Your mental health is important to me, and there’s no shame in suffering from mental health issues.

**OPTION 1: Share your story**
I’d like to take a moment to share my own experience. *Share your story.* Thanks for listening. And I want you to feel you can share your own stories with me, either here or later in private.

**OPTION 2: Share the facts**
I’d like to share some statistics from a 2015 mental health survey: Nearly one in 10 U.S. veterinarians might experience psychological distress, and more than one in six may have considered suicide. So odds are, someone on our team is either experiencing psychological distress now or will in the future.

This meeting isn’t a means of diagnosing and treating mental health issues. If you or someone they know is having suicidal thoughts, reach out to the National Suicide Prevention Hotline immediately.
5-MINUTE DISCUSSION: The 12 phases of burnout

[Pass out a copy of the “The 12 Phases of Burnout” to every attendee.] Let’s read through each of the phases. As we do this, please think about whether you’re currently experiencing any of these. [Read through handout.] Without naming names, have you seen these signs in your coworkers? [Call on team members who volunteer.] Thank you for sharing.

Burnout can often be “treated” by changing your environment. This can look like solving a persistent problem or getting a fresh start in a new work environment. With that in mind, if you are experiencing burnout, we want to help you if it is within our power. Please speak with me privately after the meeting so we can discuss ways to make your work environment less stressful.

3-MINUTE ACTIVITY: Compassion fatigue self-test

Pass out copies of “Self-test: Are you suffering from compassion fatigue?” Let’s take a quick self-test to see where we are. [Give team members two minutes to complete the test.] Our goal today is to bring awareness to the importance of mental health and to let you know we care about you and want to make sure we keep this an open discussion for our team.

5-MINUTE DISCUSSION: Compassion fatigue pressure cooker

I have one more tool I’d like to share today. [Pass out copies of “The pressure cooker of veterinary practice.”] Let’s review the four levels in chronological order and give you time to process where you might stand. [Read the four levels on the handout together.] Does anyone want to share any thoughts about the levels? Did anything jump out at you? [Call on any volunteers.] Thank you for sharing.

Let’s take a moment to look at the compassion trap box on the left-hand side to better understand how compassion fatigue can affect job performance. [Read the contents of the box.] Now look back at the self-test for the full picture of how harmful compassion fatigue can be to you, your coworkers and your patients. Unlike burnout, compassion fatigue can’t be solved by changing the work environment. Compassion fatigue is associated with the work you do, so new surroundings won’t solve it.

Thank you for taking the time to learn about signs of depression, burnout and compassion fatigue. In the next meeting, we will discuss tools and approaches for confronting these issues. However, if you feel you need immediate help, don’t wait until the next meeting to talk to me or to a mental health professional. We care about you and want you to feel comfortable seeking help when you need it.