

Susan Weber had always wanted to be a veterinarian. As early as vet school she started to feel the weight of the profession. A recent study from Kansas State indicated that 32% of first-year vet students experience depression and the incidence rises in the second and third year.

Right out of vet school Susan landed her dream job and joined a progressive practice. At first she was energized by the work. She came in early and stayed late. She took her patients files home at night so she could continue to work-up her cases. Her clients absolutely loved her and it wasn't unusual for her to make a house call on her way home. Susan spent her free time attending veterinary conferences and lectures so she could stay current. She lived and breathed veterinary medicine.

After a few years her personal relationships started to suffer and she got divorced. She had always relied on a glass or two of red wine in the evenings in order to relax but now she was drinking even more. At work her co-workers started to notice her exhaustion and increased irritability. She started to avoid her favorite clients as well as staff meetings. Susan started having severe headaches which often caused her to have to leave work early.

It wasn't until she sought help that Susan revealed how miserable she was. She was drinking a bottle of wine every night and not sleeping well from intrusive thoughts about her patients. She had no outside support from family or friends because she had isolated herself. Susan was overwhelmed with the thought that she was going to have to leave veterinary medicine because she could no longer offer the deep sense of care and compassion that her clients so loved. She admitted she felt severely depressed and had contemplated suicide.

Susan attended a compassion fatigue workshop and had an "aha moment". She recognized herself and for the first time in a long time, felt hope. With the help of a therapist trained in compassion fatigue Susan was able to regain her sense of self, identify triggers and create a self-plan for herself. In exchange she was able to tap back into her love of being a veterinarian, practice quality medicine for the benefit of her patients and their owners and also achieve balance in her life.

What keeps her motivated is remembering how close she came to ending her life.

How compassion fatigue impacts the individual:

- depression
 - hopelessness
 - physical and emotional exhaustion
 - diminished sense of career enjoyment
 - bottled up emotions
 - irritability
 - substance abuse
 - increases in mistakes
 - anxiety
 - problems in personal relationships
 - isolation
 - poor relationships with co-workers
 - avoidance of clients
 - physical ailments
 - inability to tolerate emotionally charged situations
 - intrusive thoughts/recurring nightmare
 - sleep problems
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