

Bioethics Books: Reviews

CBS Reviewer: Nipa Chauhan

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Review of: Austin, W., Brintnell, S.E., Goble, E., Kagan, L., Kreitzer, L., Larsen, D., Leier, B. (2013). *Lying Down in the Ever-Falling Snow: Canadian Health Professionals' Experience of Compassion Fatigue*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

Review

Published in 2013, *Lying Down in the Ever-Falling Snow* by Wendy Austin et al. is a compilation of essays written by various Canadian healthcare professionals about their experiences managing compassion fatigue. Utilizing the Canadian metaphor of endless winter as their guide, the authors contribute to the concept of compassion fatigue by providing anecdotes that can potentially uncover a more focused definition of it. The order in which the book is laid out is practical in that it exhibits an emotional strategy—the book becomes increasingly emotional/sentimental/distressing as the chapters progress. After the philosophical concept of human compassion is introduced and explored, the authors explain how they chose to approach such an emotional experience through hermeneutic phenomenological research; they gather four essays that illustrate how compassion fatigue affects the body, time, space, and relations. After the intimate anecdotes from health care professionals are told, the book moves on to texts that are meant to evoke hope and survival, which they believe are the most logical and emotionally important steps to take when one finds themselves directly affected by compassion fatigue. In this work, the authors successfully illustrate their experiences with compassion fatigue as it affects the body, time, space, and relations, while contributing to the research of understanding the concept itself.

Breaking down compassion fatigue's effects into four simple relational concepts proved to be a huge advantage in understanding the crippling nature of such an experience. Starting with the body, "The Cold Heart" chapter describes the numbing effect that health care workers may experience and an alarming feeling of self-awareness that commonly follows. The next chapter, "The Endless Winter", describes the seemingly never ending temporal experience of compassion fatigue, further tiring the health care worker as they attempt their routines. The chapter entitled "Lost and Alone in a Prairie Blizzard" describes the space in which the health worker finds themselves as the workplace becomes a source of dread and extreme stress. With more illustrative and emotional anecdotes, the chapter "An Icy Wall (Within and Between)" is where the authors share how relationships between clinicians and their patients develop despite the experiences of each party. Small interactions, like running into patients in grocery stores, proves to have much more of an impact on clinicians than they are comfortable with. Trying to answer questions that clinicians do not necessarily have answers to can be quite an exhausting routine.

It is recommended to read this book in installments, as the content within the book may elicit a lesser but significant response of compassion fatigue for the reader. The experiences told within the book are heart-wrenching, but they meet the goal of helping the reader understand how and why

clinicians experience such weariness and why compassion fatigue needs to be attended to more fully in the health care setting.

Ethics Issues

- Compassion Fatigue
- Clinician Burnout
- Ethics of Self-Care

About the author: Nipa Chauhan is a Master of Health Science in Bioethics student at the Joint Centre for Bioethics at the University of Toronto. Nipa is also an intern in the Bioethics department at Mount Sinai Hospital in Downtown Toronto, where she specializes in reproductive ethics, specifically within obstetrics and fertility. Nipa is immensely passionate about women's health and women's rights, and hopes to further her career in feminist ethics, and obstetrics, and gynaecology.