

You Know You Should Take Care of Yourself; Learn How to Make It Work

September 15, 2017

Carla Kemp, Senior Editor

Article type: [AAP National Conference & Exhibition](#)

Editor's note: *The 2017 AAP National Conference & Exhibition will take place from Sept. 16-19 in Chicago.*

When you think about professional development, attending conferences and participating in online continuing medical education courses likely come to mind.

Something that's just as important to your career — but often overlooked — is taking care of yourself, said Gena Castro Rodriguez, PsyD, LMFT, who will present a session titled “Doctor Heal Thyself: Health and Wellness for the Pediatrician (F4013)” from 8:30-9:15 am Tuesday in McCormick Place West, W190 A.

Dr. Castro Rodriguez is chief of victim services and parallel justice programs in the San Francisco District Attorney's Office, which serves about 8,500 crime victims each year. In her work with case managers and community workers in the field, she has seen how “secondary trauma” can take its toll.

Secondary or vicarious trauma, she explained, can affect first responders as well as mental health, medical and legal professionals who are engaged with people who are experiencing or have experienced trauma. It is included in the diagnostic criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

“It (vicarious trauma) can impact your daily function. It can impact how you feel, it can impact your mood,” Dr. Castro Rodriguez said. “For many people, it disrupts the work that they want to do. ... that they trained for, that they are passionate about, because this has become a significant part of something they have to manage.”

During the session, she will explain how the effects of working with those who experience trauma fall on a spectrum from distress to compassion fatigue to burnout and finally to vicarious trauma. Symptoms of vicarious trauma can include hypervigilance, re-experiencing stories, fear and anxiety. Those with the disorder need to work with a therapist, Dr. Castro Rodriguez said, and medication could be a treatment option.

Physicians who find themselves on the other end of the spectrum can take plenty of steps to make sure they don't end up with a full-on diagnosis. Strategies include eating right, exercising, getting enough sleep and turning off their phones so they aren't accessible 24/7. Because pediatricians have heard all that before, Dr. Castro plans to discuss how to identify what is preventing them from implementing those practices.

“I want to focus on what are the things that get in the way of that — the feeling like we have to be there or someone won't be OK or the need in us to take care of other people but put ourselves behind that,” she said.

Dr. Castro Rodriguez also will propose self-care strategies that go beyond the usual like finding other roles to play that are professionally fulfilling. Options can include joining the board of an organization that serves the population you care for or working on policy and legislation to advance patient health.

After hearing her speak, some people tell her that they are on the far end of the spectrum and are moving in the direction of secondary trauma, she said.

“It’s great if people see themselves heading there because there’s so much you can do to prevent it,” Dr. Castro Rodriguez said. “And then the people who are already there, it’s good for them to know there are still things you can do. It’s not too late, and you can stay in the profession that you love, but you need to focus on yourself, too.”

Follow Dr. Castro Rodriguez’s office on Twitter @SFVictimService.

For more coverage of the AAP National Conference & Exhibition visit <http://bit.ly/2vm1VUU> and follow AAPNews on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

Copyright © 2017 American Academy of Pediatrics