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Preventing Burnout in Mental Health Counseling Students: A Shared Responsibility

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Abstract

Burnout is an ongoing concern for counseling professionals across the career span. Master's students studying to enter the field are vulnerable to burnout due to multiple factors, including the numerous challenges associated with graduate school and the dearth of experience coping with the pressures of clinical work. The onus of self-care is often placed solely on students, yet the training process allows opportunity for shared responsibility among leaders who encounter counselors in training. Considering the roles of counselor educators, faculty, and administrators; counselor supervisors and workplace leaders; and master's-level students themselves, the authors apply the 5 P Communitarian Model for Preventing Burnout (Simionato et al., 2019) to the master's-level counseling training process and suggest strategies for prevention.

Keywords

preventing burnout; 5 P communitarian model for preventing burnout; counselor education; collective care; counselor self-care

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Abstract

Burnout is an ongoing concern for counseling professionals across the career span. Master's students studying to enter the field are vulnerable to burnout due to multiple factors, including the numerous challenges associated with graduate school and the dearth of experience coping with the pressures of clinical work. The onus of self-care is often placed solely on students, yet the training process allows opportunity for shared responsibility among leaders who encounter counselors in training. Considering the roles of counselor educators, faculty, and administrators; counselor supervisors and workplace leaders; and master's-level students themselves, the authors apply the 5 P Communitarian Model for Preventing Burnout (Simionato et al., 2019) to the master's-level counseling training process and suggest strategies for prevention.

Significance to the Public

Burnout among professional counselors is a significant concern that can be addressed in the master's level training process. This paper's application of the 5 P Communitarian Model for Preventing Burnout provides practical strategies to all those involved in the training process.

Keywords: preventing burnout; 5 P communitarian model for preventing burnout; counselor education; collective care; counselor self-care

Master's-level students face myriad challenges during their programs, including incorporating self-care, professional identity development, role conflict/role development, building a professional network, integrating course material, and working directly with clients. The stressors experienced during graduate school are expansive and include institutional demands, financial constraints, performance anxiety and evaluations, compassion fatigue, managing personal and professional relationships, and a lack of experience (Badali & Habra, 2003; Lee et al., 2018; Myers et al., 2012) to name only a few. Concurrently, students encounter long lists of self-care tips: "Meditate! Don't overextend yourself! Reach out for help! Exercise!

Get quality sleep! Take days off! Set realistic expectations! Trust the process!" Yet, these suggestions may be received as platitudes and translating them into practices that work for individual students can prove difficult. To maintain personal wellness while completing master's program requirements and developing clinical skills to work effectively with clients, students must guard against burnout. Students need support in truly understanding and implementing self-care.

Recent headlines surrounding the mental health provider shortages in the United States underscore the importance of fostering career sustainability for mental health counselors and related professions. A

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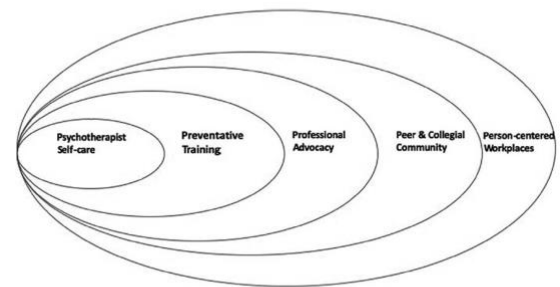
recent study from National Council for Mental Wellbeing (2023) revealed that nine out of ten behavioral health providers have experienced burnout, and nearly half have considered leaving their profession. According to the Health Resources and Services Administration (n.d.), nearly half of the U.S. population, or 163 million people, live in designated Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs) as of July 2023. Furthermore, in their analysis of reported graduation and licensure data, the clinical supervision solution firm Motivo (McCrickard, 2023) estimated that approximately 57% of master's level graduates in Mental Health Counseling and Clinical Social Work nationally do not attain full licensure in the three-year period following graduation. Their survey of new graduates further revealed that cost and complicated processes, low pay, and burnout were the most cited barriers to obtaining independent licensure. Coupled with the knowledge that mental healthcare providers may be at increased risk for death by suicide (Huss, 2020), an investment in the prevention of burnout for students studying to enter the field is critical. The 5 P Communitarian Model for Preventing Burnout (5 P Model, Simionato et al., 2019, see Figure 1), intended for use with working psychotherapists, provides a strong basis for developing practical strategies toward sharing the responsibility of wellness among counseling professionals. Our goal in this article is to extend the 5 P Model beyond the workplace and apply it to the entirety of the counselor training process to create a foundation of a culture of shared responsibility for counselor wellness.

Counselor identity development is an ongoing, developmental process that occurs throughout the stages of counselors' careers (Dollarhide et al., 2023), and is most apparent for counselors-in-training due to the abundance of new information they must integrate in the early stages of training. Assimilating this information while also learning to fit in at a clinical placement site, developing a personal approach to working with clients, and continuing to excel academically can be overwhelming, especially when balancing the demands of family and other paid work. Students, supervisors, faculty, and administrators can work

together to support counselor identity development, a critical component of which is investment in career longevity through the prevention of burnout. By shifting their perspective from "getting through school" to allowing for an opportunity to develop professional competencies that will be carried into their careers, leaders can assist counselors in training in developing an individualized model of wellness that considers the uniqueness of each situation. In doing so, counselors at all levels can invest in the sustainability of the broader profession.

Figure 1.

The 5 P Communitarian Model for Preventing Burnout



Note. Reprinted by permission from Simionato, G., Simpson, S., & Reid, C. (2019). Burnout as an ethical issue in psychotherapy. *Psychotherapy, 56*(4), 470-482. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pst0000261>

■ Counselor-in-Training ■ Burnout

Counselor wellness and burnout are well-studied topics, and burnout is an ethical issue due to its impact on counselor effectiveness and client outcomes (Salyers et al., 2015; Simionato et al., 2019; Yang & Hayes, 2020). The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) 2024 standards require that students engage in "self-care, self-awareness, and self-evaluation strategies for ethical and effective practice" (2023, Section 3.A.11), and the American Counseling Association (ACA) 2014 Code of Ethics accounts for self-care as a professional responsibility (2014, Section C). The consequences of burnout are significant, including physical ailments, negative impacts on relationships, increased maladaptive coping, cognitive impairments, and psychological distress (Cook et al., 2021; Posluns & Gall, 2020). In an international study of counseling trainees, Kaeding

et al. (2017) found that the early maladaptive schemas most predictive of burnout were unrelenting high standards for personal performance and self-sacrifice. This is particularly applicable for counselors in training as these schemas encompass behaviors that may be rewarded in the early stages of counselor training, such as gaining admission into graduate school, performing well academically, and earning recognition for their commitment at clinical sites. These seemingly positive rewards can end up increasing counseling students' risk for burnout. Disturbingly, the risk factors most frequently associated with burnout are being younger and female (Simionato & Simpson, 2018) and this risk is heightened for historically marginalized groups (Shell et al., 2021). Furthermore, the individualistic nature of conceptualizations of self-care does not take into consideration cultures that may consider care for others as a form of self-care (Tusasiirwe & Silva Brito, 2022), nor does it account for those individuals who simply do not have the resources to do so. Not surprisingly, Um and Bardhoshi (2022) noted that burnout in trainees is predicted by conflicting work and family obligations, demanding workload, and financial strain, all of which are unavoidable for the vast majority of counseling students. Um and Bardhoshi further warned that burnout can lead to trainees "who are emotionally exhausted, cynical of their work, and less self-efficacious" (p. 168).

Scholars have identified several protective factors that can have a moderating effect on counselor burnout, including social integration, job control and self-determination, reliable alliance, and a sense of community (Myers et al., 2012; O'Connor et al., 2018; Shannon, 2023; Sun et al., 2022). Yet, when students and beginning counselors enter the field, they experience systemic barriers such as low pay, lack of culturally informed support and mentorship, and difficult working conditions (McCrickard, 2023). Historically marginalized groups face the additional compounding effects of systemic discrimination coupled with a lack of representation in academic and work settings (Spellman et al., 2021) thus making it difficult to see a path to career sustainability. Notably, Um and

Bardhoshi (2022) found that the impact of meaningful work on counselor burnout was inconclusive, making it clear that counselors-in-training cannot rely on fulfillment from work alone to set themselves up for a sustainable career in the field. Hence, it seems apparent that counseling students must be intentional in developing a framework for career wellness, a foundation which can and clearly should be built into master's-level training processes.

■ The 5 P Communitarian ■ Model for Preventing Burnout

Scholars have highlighted the individualistic nature of self-care (Chamberlain, 2020; Reynolds, 2011; Tusasiirwe & Silva Brito, 2022). Reynolds (2019) emphasized that "self-care is often prescribed as the antidote to burnout, but it is individualized, positions workers as damaged and does not respond to the social determinants of health and context of social justice in which persons suffer and workers struggle" (p. 164). Furthermore, traditional conceptualizations of self-care are highly dependent on power and privilege, where individuals with greater access to resources and social capital may appear "more well" than their colleagues for their ability to engage in more "self-care" activities (Chamberlain, 2020; Reynolds, 2019). Simionato and colleagues (2019) proposed a strengths-based approach to preventing burnout that encompasses the wide range of supports that mental health providers, educators, supervisors, and leaders in the field can draw on to promote and preserve wellness. The 5 P Model (Simionato et al., 2019) outlines the necessity of *person-centered workplaces* that honor the individual needs of care providers, drawing on *peer and collegial networks* for support, *professional advocacy* for oneself in relation to work and workplace needs, *preventative training* as a means of promoting activities that preserve wellness, and *psychotherapist self-care* that is tailored to needs, resources, and individuality. By shifting the burden of self-care from the individual to the collective environments where beginning and seasoned counselors operate, counseling programs and organizations can be change agents in signaling

a commitment to a community approach to preventing burnout. In providing a practical application of this model to counselor education programs, we have identified action steps for three stakeholder groups, including faculty and administrators, site leaders and clinical supervisors, and master’s students themselves (see Figure 2). Additionally, we present a case example that highlights how adjustments to the status quo at all levels of support can create an environment where master’s-level students are able to maintain wellness through the course of the rigorous counselor training process.

Person-Centered Workplaces

The workplace is a multifaceted environment for students and includes academic classrooms, research labs, and clinical placement settings, all of which might be virtual, face-to-face, or some combination of the two. The primary responsibility for person-centered workplaces falls largely on administrators, faculty, and clinical supervisors, yet students can also contribute to this goal.

Figure 2.

The Applied 5 P Model for Graduate Students in Counseling

	Counselor Educators, Faculty, and Administrators	Counselor Supervisors and Workplace Leaders	Master’s-Level Counseling Students
Person-Centered Workplaces	<i>Establish a developmental mindset to help students manage expectations.</i>	<i>Establish formal supports, implement pay structures, and affirm growth.</i>	<i>Approach work with a learning mindset to promote growth and development.</i>
Peer and Collegial Networks	<i>Encourage active participation in groups linked to students’ interests.</i>	<i>Invest in the supervisory alliance and connect trainees to other professionals.</i>	<i>Link outreach efforts to interests to foster lasting authentic connections.</i>
Professional Advocacy	<i>Incorporate advocacy into the curriculum with a foundation in self-advocacy.</i>	<i>Create opportunities to invite trainee self-advocacy and share examples.</i>	<i>Proactively manage the supervisory relationship to advocate for needs.</i>
Preventative Training	<i>Counsel regarding self-reflection and offer support through formal and informal training.</i>	<i>Encourage participation with events and reimbursement.</i>	<i>Align training with personal interests to maximize benefit and implementation.</i>
Psychotherapist Self Care	<i>Incorporate self-care in mission and normalize compassion fatigue and help-seeking.</i>	<i>Incorporate discussions of self-care into supervision to emphasize importance.</i>	<i>Reflect on self-care and practice flexibility when engaging in and implementing plans.</i>

Counselor Educators, Faculty, and Administrators

Counselor educators, faculty, and administrators may be the only professional counseling role

models that students are exposed to early in their training. This positions program leaders with a unique responsibility to create an environment where a developmental mindset can be established. Counselor educators may consider differentiating between “good” and “good enough” for students to begin orienting them toward the growth mindset necessary for competent and sustainable clinical work. Many individuals pursuing graduate degrees in counseling hold high achievement as a performance norm. In the early stages of clinical work, counselor educators and faculty can help students to craft realistic expectations for growth and skill development. In doing so, counselor educators can create an environment where counselors in training seek out learning and growth opportunities in their daily practice.

Counselor Supervisors and Workplace Leaders

The work of counseling can be an isolating experience, one that may be jarring for students who are exposed to this reality for the first time and intensified by the rise in telemental health services. Interviews of focus group participants at various career stages revealed that the primary professional identity development task of new counselors is to reconcile expectations with reality, and that moving through this requires external validation from supervisors and clients (Moss et al., 2014). Supervisors may consider taking a strongly developmental, strengths-based approach with new practicum and internship students by patiently focusing on teaching, guidance, and affirmation in the early stages of supervision and moving toward pushing students out of their comfort zones as they gain confidence and experience. Incorporating opportunities to ensure students and organizational wellness goals complement one another through the use of values exercises during group supervision sessions can help foster a feeling of collective support and alignment.

Low pay post-graduation and unpaid internships create barriers to entry for individuals considering a career in mental health counseling – potential students may never begin the training process as a

result. Paid internships decrease barriers to entry and increase diversity (Kessler et al., 2023).

Workplace leaders can begin to change the culture around unpaid labor through the use of stipends, hourly wages, or rate splits. By taking advantage of government grants and funding, employers can reduce the initial cost of paying interns and signal acknowledgment of the inequity of unpaid labor.

Master's-Level Counseling Students

Students themselves may fear that impacting workplace culture is “too big” or is outside of their scope of control. In their review of professional identity development literature, Dollarhide and colleagues (2023) suggested “counselors may want to specifically pay attention to the processes of confidence, learning and knowledge, experience, external support, advocacy, power, congruence of the personal and professional self, and individuation within the counseling profession” (p. 11). Hence, students are uniquely positioned to approach mentoring relationships from the perspective of learning and may consider harnessing their role as trainees to facilitate discussions regarding the necessary ingredients for career stamina. By intentionally broaching a culture of balance and learning, students themselves can play a role in fostering person-centered workplace cultures and help define career wellness for themselves (and their colleagues).

Peer and Collegial Networks

Counselor Educators, Faculty, and Administrators

Um and Bardhoshi (2022) highlighted the importance of faculty support and mentorship in preventing burnout. Programs require students to secure professional liability insurance, and many students in the United States choose to do so through the American Counseling Association (ACA) or the American Mental Health Counselors Association (AMHCA). Participation in such professional organizations provides an opportunity for students to engage further in their local counseling communities. Knight and Newby (2019) suggested that professional development groups

may act to bolster students’ counseling skills and deepen their understanding of group dynamics. Counselor educators can encourage students to actively participate in professional organizations by promoting their involvement with state-level counseling associations, interest-specific groups, and local chapters to support their growth and expand their networks. Furthermore, programs can and should make efforts to increase representation and retention of marginalized students through outreach efforts. Examples include grant and scholarship programs such as the Holmes Scholars Program and the National Board for Certified Counselors’ Minority Fellowship Program, as well as mentoring programs (Spellman et al., 2021; Thiem & Dasgupta, 2022).

Counselor Supervisors and Workplace Leaders

In a study examining the supervisory relationships of practicum students, Ghazali and colleagues (2016) found a positive correlation between the strength of the supervisory relationship and supervision satisfaction, which has implications for a student’s feelings of fulfillment, desire to continue training and do better work, and more thoroughly disclose pertinent information in supervision. Supervisors may consider fostering open communication through the use of relational supervision approaches or utilizing assessment tools such as the Leeds Alliance Supervisory Scale (LASS; Wainwright, 2010) to evaluate and strengthen the supervisory alliance. Clinical supervisors should look for opportunities to introduce student interns into their professional networks. To further support this goal, workplace leadership and supervisors may consider fostering a sense of community in the workplace by establishing work groups such as practicum and internship student cohort meetings, group supervision including all levels of licensure, book clubs, and leadership team office hours. In a study of the impact of group identification on burnout, Avanzi and colleagues (2015) found that higher levels of workplace identification were associated with greater social support and lower levels of burnout. Workplace leadership may consider

encouraging the creation of interest groups within their organization, networking with area care providers, and developing mentoring programs to increase opportunities for developing strong professional networks.

Master's-Level Counseling Students

The importance of supportive relationships for general wellness has been closely studied. In a study examining peer relationships, Chui and colleagues (2014) highlighted the importance of cultivating supportive relationships across settings (peers, faculty, and instructors), and depersonalizing negative peer interactions that may inevitably occur. Furthermore, students in a study examining online master's in counseling programs identified the importance of relationship building across all levels of programming for success (Sheperis et al., 2020). This is especially true for historically marginalized groups as counseling is rooted in White, Western, patriarchal values create barriers for underrepresented populations without intentionally attuning to important cultural factors (Chan et al., 2022). The importance of diverse, quality networks of supportive relationships is clear. Students must authentically cultivate relationships that are mutually beneficial to promote personal resilience and career longevity. Participating in committees, interest groups, and research opportunities can aid in developing networks that align with professional interests. Students may consider reviewing faculty biographies and reaching out to discuss research interests, finding time outside of classes to connect with faculty and professors to gain perspective or advice, and volunteering for faculty-led committees that may align with a student's interests.

Professional Advocacy

In developing the 5 P Model, Simionato and colleagues (2019) operationalized professional advocacy as advocacy for oneself, rather than for the broader profession. Hence, this construct begins with individuals advocating for their own needs, and support from leaders and mentors can help to cultivate an advocacy mindset. In the context of burnout, self-advocacy is a critical component of ensuring individual structural needs are met for

working in a sustainable way, thus paving the way for expanded advocacy efforts.

Counselor Educators, Faculty and Administrators

The 2024 CACREP standards include 19 standards directly related to advocacy (CACREP, 2023), making the professional importance of such skills quite clear. Due to counseling's emphasis on advocacy, coursework aimed at developing advocacy skills should be standard. Educators may consider deepening a student's understanding of self-advocacy skills through application case studies and assignments that emphasize respectful communication of personal needs balanced with organizational goals. By starting with individual advocacy, students develop first-hand experience that may inform their future clinical practice. Faculty may also wish to highlight the power imbalances inherent in the training process and utilize their positions of power to advocate for individual students. Many counselors in training may have difficulty self-advocating for fear of push back or retaliation, and individuals in positions of power have the authority to advocate for better working conditions for those who are new to the world of counseling.

Counselor Supervisors and Workplace Leaders

Workplace leaders may consider inviting feedback and suggestions through the use of anonymous workplace surveys, providing forums for communication through all employee meetings, and being present and available to employees on a regular basis. In doing so, leaders can foster an environment where self-advocacy is welcomed and integrated in the workplace culture. In order to illustrate the practice of professional advocacy, supervisors may consider sharing examples of times in their own careers when they self-advocated and their takeaways. A practice such as this may be especially impactful for students who share an identity with their supervisor.

Master's-Level Counseling Students

The inherent power imbalance between students and their faculty and supervisors can make self-advocacy a tall order for counselors in training. Lannin and colleagues (2019) reported that student helpers with higher levels of self-efficacy experience lower physiologic stress. Engaging in self-advocacy in professional settings may act to increase confidence and contribute to lower levels of stress. Pearson (2004) offered strategies beginning counselors may take to gain the most from their supervisory relationship(s), including researching quality attributes of successful trainees and rating themselves, asking supervisors what has made supervisees successful/unsuccessful in the past, and asking supervisors for what they need. Pearson also suggested that counselors in training should initiate interactions with supervisors by making a good first impression, being prepared to ask questions, demonstrating openness and self-reflection, and working in between sessions to process, research, and implement topics discussed in supervision. Development of self-advocacy skills can provide important parallel learning opportunities for counselor advocacy competencies.

Preventative Training

The 2024 CACREP standards require that students “participat[e] in seminars, workshops, or other activities that contribute to personal and professional growth” (2023, Section 1.L). Kaeding and colleagues (2017) highlighted the importance of self-advocacy training across the spectrum of learning environments - individual, school, and workplace. If training on self-care is not emphasized across all environments students may experience dissonance. For example, if students see faculty advisors setting boundaries around time off and scheduling, but workplace leaders consistently working during their designated “off” hours, they may believe balance is only possible in certain settings, or that they may be punished if they disconnect during their non-work hours.

Counselor Educators, Faculty, and Administrators

Self-reflection is a core component of counselor education and growth (Granello, 2010), and that

reflection may be destabilizing for some students who are asked to do so with more depth than ever before or who have never been expected to explicitly self-reflect. Counselor educators and faculty can advise students to make active choices regarding their personal engagement with course material and provide opportunities for additional support when needed through growth groups, preceptorship, and supervision that facilitates self-reflection. As a part of their commitment to wellness, program leadership can provide opportunities for students to conceptualize self-care by providing varied training on the topic.

Counselor Supervisors and Workplace Leaders

Workplace leaders may consider hosting events and training highlighting self-care strategies, and full or partial reimbursement for certifications and continuing education related to self-care. Given the possible detrimental impact of burnout on clinical work (Posluns & Gall, 2020; Salyers et al., 2015), it stands to reason that counselors engaging in effective self-care will be more efficacious with their clients, which benefits not only individuals but businesses and the greater mental health community of practice.

Master’s-Level Counseling Students

Though it can be difficult to measure the efficacy of self-care (Miller, 2022), and thus training on the subject, research still suggests that receiving training in this area may be effective in promoting self-care (Callan et al., 2021). Students can be reassured that giving attention to improving efforts at self-care will be fruitful as a part of the continual learning process. Students may consider seeking out training opportunities that are aligned with their interests and identities to make the most of their time and effort.

Psychotherapist Self-Care

Counselor Educators, Faculty, and Administrators

Counselor educators and supervisors play an important role in encouraging self-care among

students (Arcuri Sanders et al., 2020), making it important for program leadership to be attuned to the integration of a culture of self-care into the curriculum and the overall mission of the programs they are responsible for. Research suggests that faculty supervisors frequently and actively engaged in discussions regarding care of self (Thompson et al., 2011), suggesting that a culture of self-care may be taking root in academic settings. Counselor educators and faculty may consider encouraging students to seek out forums for personal development and self-care within their programs that may be promoted in weekly newsletters or classes. Programs may also wish to provide formal supports, such as free or low-cost counseling for students through the course of their training.

Miller (2022) noted systemic barriers to self-care, including the assumption that students know what encompasses self-care, placing the burden of self-care wholly on individual students, and the pathologization of impairment, which may result in reluctance toward help-seeking. Individuals hesitant to seek help may be acting under the assumption that care providers may view them as placing their clients at risk due to their own mental health needs (Huss, 2020). This pathologization is reinforced by state ethics codes which may influence individuals' willingness to seek help when impaired. Educators have a responsibility to normalize the experiences of compassion fatigue and educate students about being attuned to personal warning signs of burnout.

Counselor Supervisors and Workplace Leaders

In a study examining supervision related to self-care practices, Thompson and colleagues (2011) noted that supervision can play an important role in building professional resilience, yet participants in their study reported that no site supervisors initiated discussions of self-care or prevention of burnout. These findings suggest the need for a fundamental shift in the orientation of counselor supervisors to reflect a focus on self-care. Supervisors may consider making self-care an active component of supervision through the use of personal and professional check-ins, or the creation of self-care

plans that also consider cultural differences in self-care behaviors.

Master's-Level Counseling Students

In 2020, the Executive Council of Chi Sigma Iota Counseling Academic & Professional Honor Society International (CSI International) endorsed nine wellness competencies for counselors, including self-care; personal relationships; boundaries; stress, burnout, and impairment; professional support practices; wellness promotion; wellness research; wellness assessment; and wellness-based goal setting and plans (Gibson et al., 2021), emphasizing the field's commitment to counselor wellbeing. In a review of the literature examining the impact of self-care on wellness, Posluns and Gall (2020) reported that effective self-care encompasses six domains: awareness, balance, flexibility, physical health, and spirituality. Narratives from master's-level counseling students have highlighted the importance of being intentional and proactive regarding their care of self (Thompson et al., 2011). Given these findings, master's-level trainees may consider creating personal wellness plans encompassing wellness domains, journaling for the purposes of self-awareness, or using evaluation tools such as the Counselor Burnout Inventory (Lee et al., 2007) to appraise engagement and well-being. Students may also wish to approach self-care as a process through the lens of their goals. By doing so, students can maximize their efforts and cultivate activities that benefit them individually.

Self-reflection is emphasized in many mental health counseling programs, inevitably giving rise to personal growth and change. A study examining the impact of counseling training programs on personal relationships identified themes of relationship ruptures as students undergo change (Daldorph & Hill, 2022). Given the importance of supportive relationships for self-care, students must consider the impact personal and professional growth may have on their existing relationships and may wish to have a plan for integrating these changes into their communication patterns and interactions. Literature examining the impact of personal counseling on counselor effectiveness has

been inconclusive (Drew et al., 2017), yet students should still consider engaging in personal counseling for the purposes of processing experiences, examining personal growth, addressing changes in their self-concept that may occur during the course of training, and experiencing what it's like to be a client.

Students often hear the phrase “it depends” when considering case conceptualization questions. This phrase could be aptly applied to striving for personal wellness. That is, self-care is highly dependent on the needs and resources of an individual, which will undoubtedly shift over time. By orienting themselves toward their own personal needs, students can select self-care activities to achieve their goals. Students would do well to look for examples of counseling leaders modeling self-care, take up opportunities for self-care offered by their programs, and familiarize themselves with formal supports available at their schools (e.g., student assistance programs, directors of student support). The importance of self-care is clear, and the many approaches may prove overwhelming. Reassuringly, Dillman Taylor and colleagues (2018) found that perceived wellness tends to increase with time, suggesting that continued efforts toward crafting a personal “formula” for self-care may result in a possible amplification of learning based on experience.

Case Example Highlighting Strategies for Collective Care Using the 5 P Model

Courtney is a 43-year-old cisgender female with a marginalized racial identity. She is completing her master's in clinical mental health via the traditional track her college provides and was offered an entrance scholarship aimed at supporting underrepresented students. When starting the program, she is working full-time while balancing the needs of her family (two school-aged children, a spouse who also works full-time, and caring for an aging parent). Monica is a friend of Courtney's from undergrad, whom she initially bonded with because of their similar backgrounds and professional goals. Monica is beginning her

master's at the same time as Courtney at a different institution, and due to her similar life stage, is balancing similar demands and priorities. As Courtney embarks on her program of study, she begins classes where professors highlight the rigorous nature of the training process and emphasize the importance of burnout prevention, noting that a “collective care” approach is key, a concept that is novel to Courtney. Professors further state that there are a number of resources available, including faculty mentorship, interest-specific and identity-based groups, free and reduced cost personal counseling, and curriculum tailored to burnout prevention. In one class a professor who shares an identity with Courtney shares an anecdote about how she struggled to find her footing in her own master's program and her evolution toward finding balance using a developmental mindset. She follows this up by asking students to commit to checking out one resource over the next week. Conversely, Monica begins classes and while she hears about the rigor of her program and the importance of self-care, she receives no guidance on what “balance” might look like, or the resources available to her. Monica is left feeling somewhat isolated and untethered as her study gets underway. As time passes, Courtney settles into a pace that is challenging, yet manageable. She has developed a strong support network of peers through her involvement in an interest-based group, and they are supported by a faculty mentor who is intentional about regularly checking in with students about their capacity. When Courtney begins her internship placement, she is told that her site pays an hourly rate for sessions she conducts, and as a result, Courtney is able to reduce her hours at her existing job significantly. While finances are a concern, her family feels stretching their budget is justified to maintain wellness. At her site, she is offered weekly group supervision that clinicians at all levels of licensure participate in, and she is able to integrate into the practice culture and learn from the experiences of others at different career stages. She enjoys working with her supervisor who is welcoming of her learning process and provides a great deal of encouragement. Along the way, she and her supervisor experience a rupture after a

difficult client experience, but her supervisor has been using regular check-ins each week to assess the relationship and encouraging feedback, so Courtney feels comfortable to take a risk and share direct feedback for improvement. During this process, she checks in with her faculty liaison, who supports by offering to be present for the feedback with her supervisor, coaching her through how to phrase the feedback, and being available to debrief. Monica, on the other hand, begins her training process at a site that is rumored to “overwork” their interns, expecting nearly 30 hours of commitment per week with no pay. Furthermore, Monica is supervised by a person who themselves appears overworked and she finds “hard to pin down” for consistent supervision and she is unclear about how or what her needs are from supervision. As the training process closes, Courtney is able to reflect on her training process and the multiple levels of support she experienced. Though she felt that her own success was ultimately her responsibility, she knew that her program and workplace leaders were invested in her wellness as the foundation for her success. Courtney graduates with a sense of commitment to her own development and to the profession with healthy boundaries that she was able to establish within the system of support from her site and program. Upon graduation, Monica is left feeling burnt out and questioning whether she has chosen the right career; however, she feels she has no choice but to begin work as a counselor given her huge time and financial investment.

Discussion

Shifting the culture of responsibility for counselor self-care from individuals to the collective stakeholders is fraught with barriers. Fiscal, time, and structural limitations are baked into the training process and are not easily undone. Budget restrictions in educational settings limit the amount and type of support that is possible for master’s-level students. For example, though CACREP requires specific ratios of full-time faculty (FTEs) to students, programs are rarely overstaffed, leading to a trickle-down effect where there are upper limits of capacity for additional student support.

Institutions could adopt creative approaches to building in structural support, such as allocating resources for student support by utilizing alumni networks to provide formal mentorship, but programs such as this would require financial resources to begin and maintain. Institutions would therefore need to decide that a collective approach to preventing burnout matters enough to include it in the budget process. Commitments from the highest level of leadership are a good first step in addressing these issues. Institutions and employers should look first to their existing processes to identify areas of opportunity (e.g., taking time within existing meeting structures) rather than adding additional programs, lessening the burden of change, and instead focusing on shifting organizational cultural incrementally. Incorporating a collective focus on preventing burnout into organizational values and annual business goals using formal metrics such as employee and student satisfaction surveys and target utilization of student/employee assistance program benefits may also lead to cultural shifts.

Master’s-level counselors in training are uniquely positioned to utilize their programs as a training ground for career sustainability. Additionally, program and placement personnel are in position to strongly influence student experience. The case study outlined in this article illustrates how the compounding impact of a collective approach to preventing burnout has the potential to shift the current reality of the training process. We echo Miller’s (2022) argument that self-care should be a shared effort between students, faculty, program leadership, and supervisors. However, the burden appears to remain squarely on students. Still, students can play a role in promoting a culture of self-care in their programs, workplaces, and within themselves. The CSI-endorsed wellness competencies (Gibson et al., 2021) highlight the counseling field’s commitment to preventing burnout, yet the perceived cost of investing in the prevention of burnout remains high. While leaders in the field may have a personal understanding of the case for developing students’ abilities to advocate for self-care, tremendous patience may be required as these concepts take root. By cultivating

a culture of continual learning with respect to wellness and success, educators, leaders, and students can set themselves up for success in their master's programs and beyond.

The social justice component of self-care cannot be overlooked as a potentially confounding factor. The field of counseling contains many barriers to entry, including tuition expenses, the opportunity cost of reduced availability to work, and unpaid internships (Eggum, 2020). For many, self-care may be a luxury that they cannot afford to engage in based on their current realities. Employers and faculty must continually evaluate culture and context with respect to workplace and individual needs (Chan et al., 2022). Indeed, Miller (2022) noted the contradictory nature of calls for development of adequate self-care, highlighting that literature emphasizes the integral role of self-care in a sustainable career, yet requirements for integration into curricula is minimal. There are some programs that actively integrate self-care plans into their curriculum, yet typically put the onus on student counselors-in-training. Guarding against burnout is an ethical issue (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2023; Miller, 2022; Simionato et al., 2019) that should be addressed within coursework and discussion. Ethics professors should consider integrating additional discussion of self-care into curricula in order to emphasize the importance of counselor wellness in the early stages of counselor development. Furthermore, a framework for evaluating programmatic and workplace collective care cultures is needed to set the stage for implementing the practical strategies outlined within this article.

At a global level, CACREP can also play a role in signaling the importance of wellness and holding programs to account in preventing student burnout. CACREP standards could include a requirement for a maximum number of hours students can be required to be present at practicum/internship work sites and minimum program length to prevent overwork. Requirements such as this could negatively impact some programs that offer an accelerated pace of study. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many students are initially attracted to

an expedited training process, but often find themselves in a position of juggling too much, leading some to decelerate their pace or pause altogether to address symptoms of burnout. Furthermore, additional requirements for self-care activities supported by academic institutions such as engaging in personal counseling and the creation of self-care plans may help by increasing the focus on preventing burnout through the use of formal accountability standards.

Counselors, educators, supervisors, students, and clients will all benefit from individual and group engagement in professional advocacy efforts to mitigate some of the systemic barriers to wellness noted in this article. We recommend program and policy development to integrate and expand the strategies we've suggested here. Counseling program personnel could consider initiating dialogue with site placement partners to develop consistent systems that truly support wellness among counselors in training. While our focus in this article has been on our own area of mental health counseling, we recommend similar applications in other counseling specialties. Future scholarship should focus on developing models for communal accountability for counselor wellness and evaluative measures to assess efficacy of such models.

Conclusion

The lengthy history of the counselor training process makes shifting the tide to a culture of collective care an onerous feat, but influential people and bodies can make an impact. If programs, workplaces, and governing bodies supporting master's-level students were truly able to rally around collective care, a future of wellness could be possible. Instead of a future where the status quo of burnout, depression, anxiety, and increased risk of suicide, a world where helpers are healthy, well, and able to show up with authenticity and congruence. Counselor wellness must be prioritized for the profession to maintain sustainability and for clients to receive appropriate services. In this article, we applied the 5 P Model (Simionato et al.,

2019) to the field of counseling and offered practical strategies for counselor educators, field supervisors, and counseling students to engage in collaborative efforts toward long-term wellness. By creating a culture of shared responsibility, individuals who provide mentorship and guidance to counselors in training can strengthen the sustainability of the field of professional counseling.

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