

Walking Through the Valley

a season of dealing with anxiety and depression

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JAVMA Oct 2015 Nett et al

Risk factors for suicide, attitudes toward mental illness, and practice-related stressors among US veterinarians

- 1 in 11 had serious psychological distress
- 1 in 6 experienced suicidal ideations
- 19% of respondents receiving treatment
- 31% respondents were male
- Mean age: 30-39
- Mean practice years: 10-19



Merck Animal Health Veterinary Wellbeing Study Feb 2018

- Top concerns (of 11 tested)
 - Debt
 - Stress
 - Suicide
- Distress more prevalent in younger vets (~9%)
- Debt was a driver of distress



Merck Animal Health Veterinary Wellbeing Study

2017

- Major self-reported conditions
 - Depression (94%)
 - Compassion fatigue/burnout (88%)
 - Anxiety, panic attacks (83%)
- Only ½ receiving treatment

2021

- Wellbeing unchanged on average
- Vets 2.7x more likely to attempt suicide (Men >women)
- Wellbeing lowest among younger vets while burnout is higher
 - 1 in 5 regret becoming a vet
- Now must worry about staff mental health and retention

Predictors of Wellbeing

High wellbeing

- Enjoy work
- Work-life Balance
- Spending time with Friends and Family
- Invigorating Work Environment
- Satisfaction with Pay

Low wellbeing

- Personality higher in Neuroticism
 - a tendency to experience negative emotions like anxiety, anger, guilt, and sadness more intensely and frequently, leading to poor stress response, low self-esteem, and difficulty controlling impulses
- Higher student debt
- Younger

JAVMA, Feb 20, Perret et al

- Prevalence of mental health outcomes among Canadian veterinarians
 - 10% of vets completed survey
 - Relative to general population
 - Higher scores for burnout and compassion fatigue
 - Higher scores for anxiety and depression
 - Lower scores for resilience
 - Females higher than males
 - Perceived stress
 - Emotional exhaustion
 - Burnout
 - Secondary traumatic stress
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Suicidal ideations: 26.2%



What are anxiety and depression?

- Medical conditions
 - Like cancer?? (Illness of the mind is different)
 - Typically not cure-able but treatable
- Two manifestations of the same physical condition
 - Often viewed differently
 - Stigma
- Feel like you should be happy but you are not
 - Vet school, success, etc

What are anxiety and depression?

Anxiety

- Intense, excessive, and persistent worry or fear about everyday situations
- Panic attacks
- Interfere with daily activity, difficult to control, out of proportion, prolonged
- Avoid places or situations

Depression

- Persistent feelings of sadness and loss of interest
- May feel like life is not worth living
- Interfere with daily activity, difficult to control, out of proportion, prolonged
- Avoid places or situations

What they are NOT

- A case of the “blues”
- A weakness
- Temporary “nerves” over particular event
 - Exams (this is “normal”!)
- Momentary stress



Signs and Symptoms

- Feeling nervous, restless, or tense
- Tachycardia/Hyperventilation
- Tiredness and lack of energy; even small tasks take extra effort
- Trembling/shaking
- Irritability, frustration, especially in crowds
- “Stuck in 6th gear”
- Trouble concentrating, thinking, making decisions, remembering things
- Sleep disturbances (insomnia or sleeping too much)
- Difficulty controlling worry
- Sadness, tearfulness, emptiness or hopelessness
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt, fixating on past failures or self-blame
- GI problems
- Sense of impending danger, panic, or doom
- Sweating
- Pollakiuria
- Dry mouth

“Focus Group” of Senior Vet Students

- This is “normal” for vet students
- Vet students express it in different ways
- Over 60-70% of the class is either on medications, receiving counseling, or both
- More of a negative connotation with depression
- Hard to see the stats on suicide in vet med and not see any action
 - You are aware that it is an issue
- Higher rate of emotionally damaged people drawn to vet med
 - Verbal, physical, emotional abuse
 - Bonds with animals
 - Makes our job difficult
 - Unnecessary euthanasias

Why don't we talk about it?

- Stigma
 - I will be viewed as weak
 - Can't cope like everyone else
 - Want attention
 - Not as competent
 - I can't cut it in this profession
- Classmates may keep people from speaking up
 - I have X,Y, Z, you only have X so I'm more severe
 - Negative comments behind your back



Myths As Christians

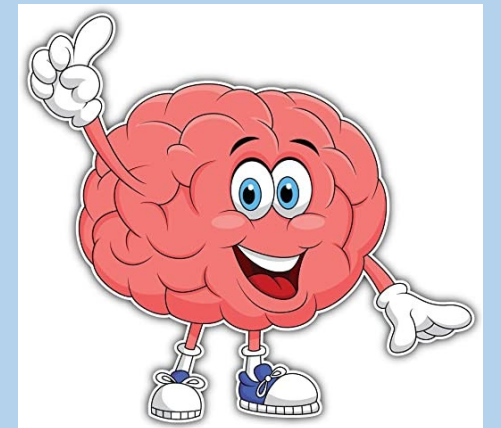
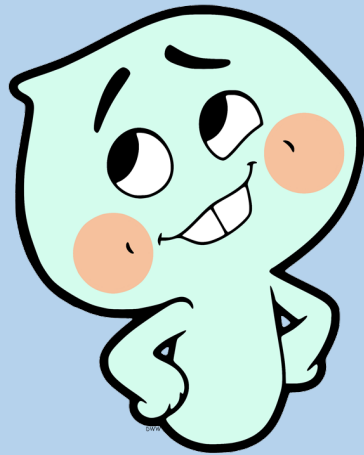
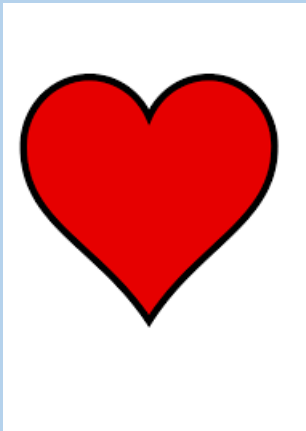
- We must have sin in our lives
- God must be punishing me
- I must deserve it
- God has abandoned me
- I'm not strong enough
- If I had more faith, I would not be dealing with this
- Christians don't have depression, we have the Holy Spirit

- Truths
 - Mental illness is not a punishment
 - God walks with us
 - God sees us
 - God is sovereign
 - He is in control and will bring us through
 - The Bible promises we will have troubles
 - **Be prepared, not surprised**

Love the Lord your God with all
your heart, and with all your soul,
and with all your strength, and
with all your mind

Luke 10:27

- Heart = emotional health
- Soul = Spiritual health
- Strength = Physical health
- Mind = Mental health



Healing happens in layers

- Take time for yourself
- Do something you enjoy
- Seek Therapy
 - Initial
 - Maintenance
- Phone Apps
 - Better Help
- Eat better
- Exercise
- Social media “fast”



On a Personal Note

- Coping ok and then one thing tips the scale
 - Four beautiful kids
 - Triplets
 - Previous child acting out
 - Directed at me
 - No control/authority as mom
 - Court case with false accusations
 - Increased work-load
 - Trouble at work
 - Accusations, Loss of trust
 - Weight gain/loss of fitness



Diagnosis: Clinical Anxiety

- Different from “normal” anxiety
 - Worry
 - Fear of something bad happening
- Physical
 - Headache
 - Shaking/tremors (hands, legs)
 - Insomnia
 - “fight or flight” constantly
 - Inability to focus
 - Scatterbrained
 - Short fuse
 - Overwhelmed by simple tasks
 - Kids lunch
 - Laundry
- My frustration:
 - No obvious trigger
 - I should be able to handle this
 - I’ve done fine so far
 - No relief from the physical symptoms
 - No available psychiatrist
 - Weeks until appt

What Now?

- Get professional help
 - Christian counselor (special interest)
 - Medical professional
 - Family physician
 - Psychiatrist
 - Be an advocate for yourself
 - May require several trials to get right meds
 - Medications (its ok)
 - Take time (3-4 weeks)
 - No one perfect treatment
 - Loops
 - Body may not catch up to meds for a year



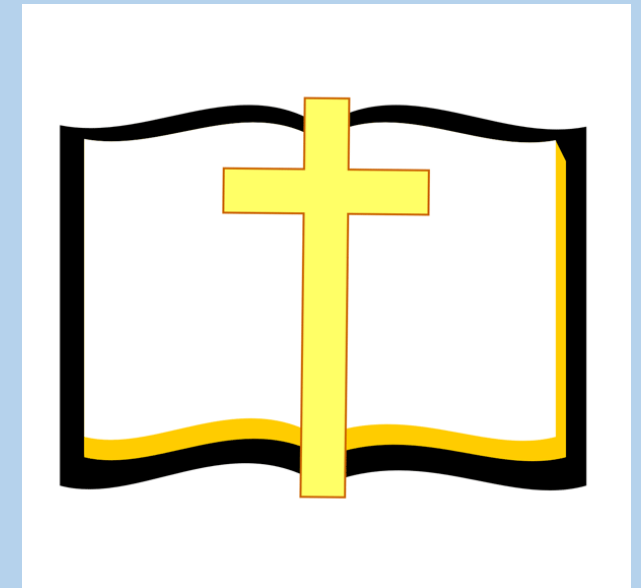
Find Hope

- Identity in Christ
 - Press into Him
- Ephesians 6
 - Spiritual warfare - armor up
- Talk to others that have walked through it
 - Charles Spurgeon
 - Tommy Nelson
 - “I thought I was the only one”
 - “Tell me I’m going to make it”
- **If we lose Hope, we lose everything**



Find Strength in Christ

- 2 Chronicles 16:9
 - **The eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him**
- Psalm 46
 - **God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear...**
- Isaiah 40:31
 - **Those who hope on the Lord will renew their strength**
- Isaiah 30:15
 - **In quietness and trust is your strength**
 - REST
 - Allow healing



Talk about it

- Bring others into our suffering and allow them to carry it with us
- Trusted friend/spouse
 - Need to be vulnerable
 - Spouses of affected people struggle too
- Tommy Nelson
 - “Through the Darkness” seminar
- God
 - “Why?” Followed by “Trust me”
 - Proverbs 3:5: Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding”

Run Your Race

- Endure
 - Take **small steps** towards trusting God and hoping in Him
 - Find joy in ONE thing
 - Spend ONE hour to yourself anyway you want
 - Keep our eyes fixed on Jesus
 - Pray
 - Quiet time
 - Be aware of the arrows and see them as what they are
- Be honest
 - Do not be ashamed
 - Even Jesus felt anxiety



Lets Get Practical

- “All you can do is all you can do” (Tommy Nelson)
 - Take small steps towards healing
- Find points of stress
 - Often requires a professional
 - Mind does not react normally
- Write down all your stressors
 - Any you can eliminate?
 - Any you can change?
 - Rest you have to accept and give to God



Recognize Satan's Attacks

As for you, the one who lives in the shelter of the Most High and resides in the protective shadow of the Sovereign One – I say this about the Lord, **my shelter and my stronghold**, my God in whom I trust – He will certainly **rescue you** from the snare of the hunter and from the destructive plague. He will **shelter you with his wings**; you will find safety under his wings. His faithfulness is like a **shield or a protective wall**.

Psalm 91:1-4

- Fears and anxieties paralyze us from seeking help
 - Lies of Satan

Beginning

- Get rid of negative thoughts
 - Focus on healthy and holy thoughts
 - Change the dialogue
- Find someone to walk alongside you
 - Safe person
- Be proactive
 - Take steps towards healing
 - Have accountability
- Seek professional help
 - What are your fears?
- Let these circumstances drive us to a deeper walk with God



Personal experience

- It is a long road
- May get harder before it gets better
- Finding a balance now will help as you start your career
- Only gets harder (or easier?)
- Take time off to heal if needed
 - Yes, you can step away
 - It is an illness
 - You will still graduate
 - You will be healthier and better able to cope



Real Issues

- Anger with God
- Apathy
- Waiting for a counseling/Dr apt
- Withdrawal from things/people
- Getting out of the “hole”
 - Takes time
 - Hard decisions
- Simple tasks still overwhelming
- Nothing changes fast



Encouragement

- You are not alone
- You will make it through this
- God is still with you
 - He never left
- A bunch of little steps still get you there
- Find your identity in Christ alone
 - Nothing else matters
- This is a struggle, but know you are not in it alone



Scripture

Cast all your cares (anxiety) on the Lord for He cares for you.

1 Peter 5:7

Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God that surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus

Phil 4:6-7

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I know live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loves me and gave himself up for me. Galatians 2:20

Do not fear for I am with you. Do not be afraid for I am your God; I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. Isa 41:10

But each day the Lord pours his unfailing love upon me, and through each night I sing His songs, praying to God who gives me life.

Psa 42:8

You are loved

You are known

You are a child of God

You are not alone

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