Origins of Compassion

Since man first walked the Earth, we were made with a complex set of emotions that enabled us to survive. It drives our basic mammalian instincts for survival for example to run from danger when feared, and seek

The Compassionate Mind Theory outlines that we have three inbuilt regulation systems that remain in an equilibrium to keep our emotions controlled;

- **Threat and self-protection system** - determines our fight or flight responses when we feel a sense of danger or threat.
- **Incentive and resource seeking system** - motivates and encourages us to find resources that keep us alive and find pleasure. This drives competition and gives us a sense of excitement and satisfaction.
- **Soothing and contentment system** - this system makes humans seek safety, love and happiness and enable us to feel calm and self soothe.

Why do we need to Develop Compassion?

In today’s society, the nature of modern day life is causing an offset to the delicate equilibrium of the three regulatory systems. As Paul Gilbert suggested, today society runs to the ‘business model’ of living, where we continuously strive for the best, trying to achieve competitive advantage and work economically efficient. This has left many in society unhappy because we have lost touch with the “flow of life”. Life seems to pass us by because we are too busy focusing on the future to reflect on today. We simply do not feel like we have the time to be kind to ourselves and to others.
In order to achieve a feeling of contentment and happiness, we have to build on being compassionate. Therefore, we have to nurture our body, care for our minds and allow time for self-reflection. The Compassionate Mind Theory focuses on taking the time to reflect on how we can be compassionate to ourselves and others, in order to develop our soothing and contentment system. It uses a mixture of mindfulness techniques and compassionate behaviour to focus our minds, in order to build on our emotional wellbeing.

By taking the time to attend a Schwartz Center Round and reflecting on our thoughts and anxieties, we are being kind and compassionate to ourselves. By first being compassionate to ourselves, we can in turn be compassionate to others, specifically our future patients.

This is increasingly salient during a time when there is a belief that compassionate care is lacking in the healthcare setting. Following failings in patient care at Mid-Staffordshire NHS Trust in 2005-2008 and Winterbourne View in 2011, it has been demonstrated that it is crucial to increase compassion in health care. Twined with a decrease in staff morale and high burnout rates amongst NHS employees, implementing elements of the Compassionate Mind Theory through Schwartz Center Rounds would be of utmost benefit.

More information on the Compassionate Mind Theory can be found at the Compassionate Mind Foundation;

http://www.compassionatemind.co.uk/

Summary References:

- Gilbert P. The Compassionate Mind. UK: Constable & Robinson Ltd, 2009