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Description

Caregivers who offer grief counseling to recovery workers at Ground Zero are themselves in danger of suffering from compassion fatigue. NBC's Rehema Ellis looks at the important role these counselors are playing just 15 weeks after the September 11th terrorist attacks.

Keywords

Caregivers, Counselors, Grief, Depression, Sadness, Counselors, Recovery, Effort, Workers, Ground Zero, 9/11, September 11, Terror, Terrorist, Attacks, Mental, Health, Compassion, Fatigue, Psychological Impact, Therapy, Frank Shane, Virginia Stern, Trauma, Emotions, Emotional, Coping, Stress, Trauma, Crisis, Anger, Rage, Distrust, Mistrust, Sad, Virginia Stern, Red Cross, Therapy, Therapist, Hope, Psychology

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Transcript

Caregivers at the World Trade Center Help Recovery Workers Come to Grips with Psychological Turmoil

TOM BROKAW, anchor:
One place that probably will not take a break this holiday will not surprise you. You're looking live at ground zero here in New York. The Christmas tree lit there, yet the grim recovery work has to go on tonight and tomorrow. Religious services and meals will be provided for the workers. Tomorrow, Christmas Day, will mark exactly 15 weeks since the attacks. And tonight, we look at one critical group at ground zero, the counselors who try to help recovery workers come to grips with their exhaustion, their grief and their psychological turmoil. How are the caregivers holding up? Here's NBC's Rehema Ellis.

REHEMA ELLIS reporting:
Just steps from ground zero, another kind of recovery effort. Mental health counselors still listening and now at risk for what experts call compassion fatigue from all the sad stories.
Mr. JOE MICCIO: You know, you find sometimes jewelry on a body part or whatever and--and it's like I want to make sure that gets to that family.
ELLIS: It's tough for firefighter Joe Miccio and tough for caregiver Frank Shane who uses a specially-trained dog to help those at ground zero bring out their feelings.
Mr. FRANK SHANE: Inside of me I hear every--everything that that person is saying, and I'm crying inside too.
ELLIS: Just as the recovery and cleanup at ground zero goes on day and night, helping people cope with the emotional and psychological impact goes on around the clock as well. For caregivers, it's taking an emotional toll. Day after day, session after session of heartbreak. And now, months later, it's the caregivers themselves increasingly in need of care.
Mr. SHANE: We always try to put ourselves second because the grief in front of us is so much more. But that's a danger zone, it's a red zone, because it affects us too.
ELLIS: Twenty-seven miles away in Ridgewood, New Jersey, Robert Klopfer is a family therapist.
Mr. ROBERT KLOPFER: I was feeling depressed.
ELLIS: Four of his clients were directly affected by the terrorists attacks. Their reactions became his reactions.
Mr. KLOPFER: Anger, distrust, rage, tremendous sadness, a sense of being overwhelmed.
Ms. MARIE SERRANO: (Talking on phone) You were in the area and you had to leave and you were injured on your way out.
ELLIS: Marie Serrano, a crisis counselor, is still getting swamped with calls to her free outreach center.
Ms. SERRANO: It's very difficult to stop and take some time and help yourself, but it's very necessary.
ELLIS: And back at ground zero, Red Cross mental health volunteers begin to take that time at the end of every shift.
Ms. VIRGINIA STERN (Red Cross Therapist): I find the things in my own life that point towards future and towards the hope I see my family.
ELLIS: Finding the good in the middle of intense pain, anger and grief. Therapy for the therapists, as well as everyone else. Rehema Ellis, NBC News, New York.