

eCPR – creating ripple effects for the Veterinary profession through embodied listening

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Emotional Connection, Empowerment, and Revitalization. eCPR is an education and training on re-finding our innate skills of embodied listening and being fully present so that we may help each other in times of crisis, and every-day living.

Four years of veterinary education, perhaps followed by another one to four years of internship and residency, are fully dedicated to anatomy, physiology, diagnostics and treatment – fixing broken parts or systems with medicine or surgery. There is tremendous responsibility in correcting, solving, finding options, and preventing death and disease. Often that responsibility is felt beyond the scope of the animal patient, and involves or includes addressing or recognizing the human client's own personal traumas, financial constraints, past experiences, or culture. Being the ultimate problem-solver is a very heavy burden to bear, and it's also something we do in nearly every conversation we have with another human or group. Person A tells us about an issue they are dealing with, and our minds instantly fire up with what he or she could or should do, how we can fix their problems and find solutions, how we can ease their pain and anxiety, and as our neurons are lighting up like rocket boosters, we are no longer being fully present with the person and story in front of us. We are cut off at the head, mind separated from body...disconnected from FEELING what is happening. We may be inadvertently trying to ease our own anxiety at the feelings that lie beneath our surface when dealing with the other person's distress. eCPR shows us there is relief in being wholly present for someone who needs to be seen, heard, felt, and validated, without spending all that mental energy trying to solve their challenges. What does that person REALLY want anyway? To be fixed? Rarely. Mostly, to be truly HEARD.

Feeling. Being wholly present with full attention in each and every moment. Utilizing our sense doors-eyes, ears, nose, skin, the heart and all internal organs, the breath. Before cell phones, social media, and mass production, we relied on our senses, our innate intuition, to survive, to hunt and gather food, to keep communities safe, to find our way home. Surrounding a person in distress and supporting them with presence, relation-based medicine, was the approach to healing. Our current Western society warns against or legally prohibits physical contact, has become lonelier the more "connected" we become, and has separated mind from body while also seeing greatly increasing numbers of stress-induced and psychosomatic disorders and illnesses. eCPR shows us a way back, back to connection – within ourselves, between individuals, among groups, and in communities.

High-achieving professionals are trained to "wall-off" to survive. Generally sensitive and deeply caring people such as Veterinarians, First Responders, Nurses, Social Workers, Therapists, Doctors, may have to separate from their emotions to get through daily life. Those faced with repeated moral stress – a situation where you know what needs to be done but are unable to do it – may become overwhelmed or numb. Veterinarians confronted with convenience euthanasias ("I know he's healthy, but he's old and Grandma's coming and we don't have room – we'll get another dog after Christmas") or cases of inconceivable animal suffering (cases of neglectful starvation-dehydration, myiasis, hoarding/puppy-mills or ring-fighting rescues), high debt-load, relationship/family stress, emotional blackmail, social media bullying, litigation, job dissatisfaction and short-staffing, peer competition, and perfectionism, may be unable to face the mounting stress, resulting in compassion fatigue, burnout, depression, anxiety,

addiction, or ultimately- suicide. Education on self-care, recognizing symptoms of compassion fatigue and burnout, business or personal financial management, and empirical training on recognizing and properly addressing issues surrounding suspected animal or human abuse, hoarding, animal-assisted therapy regulations, and more, has not been readily or regularly (if at all) provided in general veterinary education. Pre-veterinary applicants may not have a full understanding of what the profession entails, financially or emotionally, before it's too late to make changes to their career paths, or to ensure their confidence in continuing in a healthy and empowered manner.

eCPR training provides the practitioners a map and method back to connecting heart, body, and mind. Through embodied listening of a person in distress and resonating those feelings back to the individual, being curious of what we feel, we may heal our own wounds and become healthier, in turn creating ripples that help others to do the same. When eCPR is practiced in like groups – Veterinary professionals, Social Workers, Moms, First Responders, etc. – the most profound healing may simply result from realizing that regardless of professional hats, we are not alone in our stress and experiences. How many professionals leave work at work? Even if choosing not to discuss cases is a well-intentioned ethical or protective mechanism, the experienced stress can create strain and disharmony outside of the office affecting relationships and families. If we can sit and be truly heard and seen, even without a specific solution to our problem, we often feel much more capable and at ease. Most importantly, learning to be present with a client, co-worker, peer, employee, family member, gym friend, store clerk, a complete stranger in crisis, can and does save lives. eCPR will provide mental health benefits as regularly provided training in veterinary teaching hospitals, clinics, groups, professional meetings and beyond. The ripple effects will be felt both in the veterinary profession, and out into the world.

For more information about eCPR and available trainings, please review the website at: <https://emotional-cpr.org/>

Information about the University of Tennessee Veterinary Social Work and the Veterinary Human Support Certificate: <https://vetsocialwork.utk.edu/>

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