

2012 Heartland Kidney Conference:  
Partnering with our Patients  
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**Strategies for  
Clinical Success and Great Joy:  
Lessons from Social Workers**

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Session Overview

- I. Background of the study
- II. Methods
- III. Data Analysis
- IV. Results
- V. Implications for the workforce

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**Background**

- Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) ask:  
Is there a book on the Harvard Business book-  
list, or anywhere for that matter, on Executive  
Joy? And even if there isn't . . . does this mean  
that joy has nothing to do with good leadership,  
or healthy human systems? Why aren't we  
including this topic in our change efforts? What  
might happen if we did? (p. 16)

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### Background

- We wonder about social workers who find joy in their work . . . despite the fact that
  - they may be inadequately compensated,
  - often unseen and underappreciated, and
  - associated with stigmatized populations

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### Workforce Issues

- Siebert (2004) used the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) to measure depression and found that 19% of sampled social workers reported current clinical depression and 46% reported past lifetime depression.

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- Siebert (2003) also used measures to examine quantity/frequency and binge drinking among social workers and found that 22% were at a moderate risk for problem drinking and 11% had a serious risk.

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• Pooler (2008) found that a sample of social workers scored higher on a measure of distress (K10) than any other population sample.

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**Summary of Literature**

• Depression, alcohol misuse, and distress rates are higher among social workers than the general population (e.g., National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2006), providing possible evidence of:

- The types of people who self select to the profession
- Occupational stress (Mismatch between demands/expectations and resources/supports)
- Or some combination of these two

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**Social Work Joy?**

- Do some social workers experience joy at work?
- If so, why?
- So what do they know?

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### Qualitative Methods

- Appreciative Inquiry- When things are at their best what is happening?
- Snowball/convenience sampling
- Practicing social workers from Columbia, SC, Ashville, NC and Waco, TX
- Semi-structured, open-ended interviews (45 to 90 minutes) with 26 social workers
- Interviews transcribed

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### Interview Protocol

- Tell me about a recent time when you found great joy in your work. *[If the person asks what you mean by "joy," respond: "Whatever you consider joy."]* As needed, use the following probes to ensure the person mentions each aspect of the experience:
  - What happened/was happening?
  - Who was involved?
  - What was your part in this experience/situation?
  - What did you find particularly joyful in this experience?
  - What effect did this experience have on you? On your work? On the way you see yourself as a social worker?

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### Data Analysis

- Grounded Theory
  - Inductive reasoning---concepts emerge from the collected data
- Transcribed interviews coded by 3 researchers using ATLAS.ti (version 6.2)
  - If codes pass 3 people, serves as a validity check
- 128 codes

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### The Sample

- 22 women (85%), 4 men (15%)
- 3 African American (12%), 1 Hispanic (4%), 22 Caucasian (84%)
- Average age 44 (range 26-64)
- Average time in field 17.8 (range 3 to 40 years)
- Practice settings
  - medical/health care
  - child welfare
  - private practice
  - prevention/sexual health
  - children and adolescents
- 24 hold MSWs, 2 BSWs

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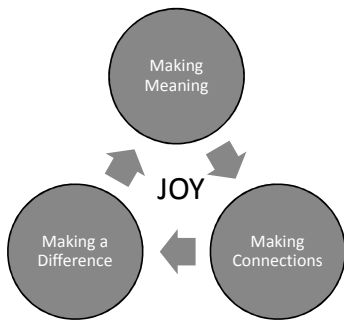
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### Preliminary Findings



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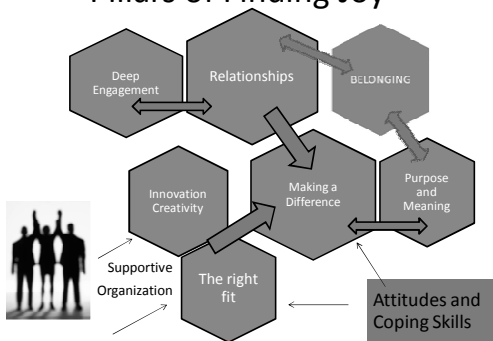
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### Pillars of Finding Joy



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### Deep Engagement

- Being Present
- Getting out of the way
- Gaining Client trust
- Being heard
- Understanding
- Connecting with clients
  - Vulnerability
  - Risk

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### Deep Engagement

- **Being Present:** being with people in distress, providing human companionship for people who may otherwise be alone
- “I don’t get joy from saying these fancy words and doing these fancy things. I get joy when somebody is changed, or when somebody is grateful, or when I can be with somebody when nobody else was there”

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### Relationships

- Knowing deeply (clients, co-workers, students, interns)
  - Vulnerability
  - Risk
  - Mutual Aid
- Caring about clients
- Finding like minded people
- Being a part of a team

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### Relationships

- **Knowing Deeply:** knowing and being known by a co-worker, mutuality in a relationship
- “because when you connect with a co-worker; your peer, you share more of yourself. So when its with a co-worker sharing of yourself as well and your experience I find joy in that. If I can lend some of my own personal experience of what I’ve gone through in the workplace with a co-worker I find a lot [of joy].”

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### Creating Belonging

- The mediator of joy (underlying process here) appears to be the facilitation of belonging
- Through deep engagement and building relationships with people who are marginalized, a [social worker, nurse, or doctor] can facilitate a sense of belonging/inclusion for people who have been excluded by society for some reason:
  - Race, illness, socioeconomic status, abandoned by family, friends

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### Innovation and Creativity (Work Place Dynamics)

- Having autonomy
- Innovating at work
- Having Variety

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### Innovation

- **Having Autonomy:** Working without organizational constraints
- “I definitely get to be creative, but I also I get to be the judge of what my patients need, I’m the one who sees them, I’m the one who’s with them. And to be able to be respected enough to where no one’s going to look over my shoulder about it. They trust that I know my patients and I know what they need and I am going to do what they need, and I do.”

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### The Right fit (Active Strategies)

- Finding fit in work
- Doing what you are good at
- Getting better at what you do
- Empowering self
- Feeling pleased with myself
- Finding what you really want to do
- Loving/liking what I do
- Seeking new goals/opportunities

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### The Right Fit

- **Finding Fit in Work:** making sure the job and the practice field suit you the best in terms of your interests and needs
- “And so, I think, what makes me happy and gratified is paying my soul back. . . I found the right fit for me. So I think that people who are burned out may not have found their best fit, the best work venue.”

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### Making a Difference

- Facilitating client belonging
  - The foundation for positive outcomes
- Facilitating change (clients, colleagues, students)
- Facilitating client quality of life
- Facilitating growth (clients, students/interns and supervisees)

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### Making a Difference

- Relieving client distress
- Relieving colleague distress
- Seeing fruits of your labor (long term view)
- Providing material aid
- Encouraging clients
- Empowering clients

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### Making a Difference

- Working at system levels
- Influencing programmatic decisions
- Facilitating system change
- Promoting justice

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### Making A Difference

- “And he called me one day out of the blue, I did not realize he had my phone number, and just wanted me to know that he had made some progress in his life. That he wanted to thank me for my involvement with him ..And in addition to that, told me that he had plans to join the job corps from some of the information we had shared with him, um, was positive in that he assured me that he would do well and that I would not see him again. So that was very inspirational.”

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### Purpose and Meaning

- Relates to helping patients and co-workers find belonging
- Finding meaning in work -feeling your work is important
- Finding purpose
  - "why you are here"
  - "being where you are supposed to be"
  - "doing what you are supposed to do"
  - "why you do what you do"
  - "mission"

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### Purpose and Meaning

- “I think that it helps me to feel like my job has a purpose and a meaning and that I am making difference because again, given the role that I am in you sit behind a desk on a computer a lot and you don't get a lot of direct feedback on, um, the progress that you are making and how you are helping.”
- “It still brings me joy to help our less fortunate seniors. And I feel like its my mission to do that, that's why I'm here. That doesn't mean it hasn't been more challenging and there have been some disheartening types of issues over the years, but at the end of the day I am where I am supposed to be.”

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### Attitudes

- Accepting Limits-humility
- Managing expectations (realistic)
- Relinquish control
- Rejoicing in little things
- Refusing cynicism
- Appreciating opportunity to connect with, relate to, and serve others
- Finding gratitude in all things
- Gaining Perspective

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### Coping Skills

- Learning Continually
- Growing in confidence
- Maximize what brings you joy
- Maturing
- Balance work and life
- Pursuing passion (even outside of work)

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### Attitudes and Coping Skills

- Accepting limits:
  - “how do I learn to pace myself more creatively? You can’t, you know, you can’t sprint for your entire career, it’s a marathon at times and you gotta know how to pace yourself and there are times where you really have to go all out but knowing when to back off, to slow down”
- Rejoicing in little things:
  - “That always gives a sense of joy, because there always is a silver lining, partially naturally and partially chosen I think”
  - “being able to find joy in the small things the simple pleasures of life and with home with family”

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### Summary

- Relationships
  - Deep Engagement
  - Creating Belonging
- Making an Impact/Difference
  - Innovating
  - Finding Fit
- Purpose and Meaning-Satisfaction
- Attitudes and Behaviors

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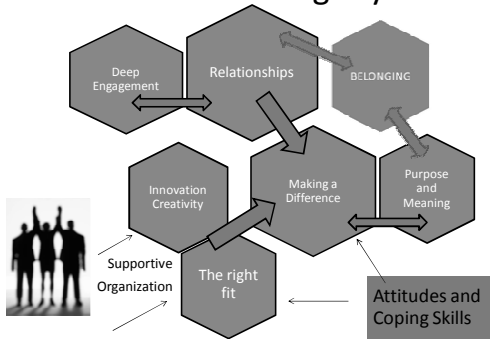
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### Pillars of Finding Joy



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### Applying Findings

- Joy cannot be forced
- Takes Practice
- Willingness to fail
- Joy happens in the process, not just the outcome
- Okay to need others, interdependence
- Joy Finding is about taking a journey to the interior
  - Healing
  - Feeling

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## Relationships

- Relationships are foundational
  - Joy in significant measures is about how well we connect with people
- Building Relationships/Deep Engagement
  - takes risk
  - being vulnerable,
  - not holding back
- Reciprocal relationships and social support
- Networks of colleagues beyond your own workplace
- Pursue relationships and activities beyond work
- Good boundaries: Knowing when to say “yes” and “no”
- Relational integrity “to thine own self be true”
- Being able to ask for help

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## Belonging

- We first need to belong and then we can invite others to participate in “life”: being included, accepted, understood, and loved.
- American society and culture (focus only on workplace productivity, rugged individualism) can dehumanize us, works against belonging
- We cannot transmit what we do not have

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## Innovation

- Experiment and try new things (creativity outside the box)
- Innovate when possible, create a work environment that is safe to try new things to meet client needs
- Change policies that do not enhance wellbeing
- What keeps innovation stifled at work?

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### Right Fit

- Are you in the right place?
- Are there enough resources to help you succeed?
- Are you willing to change or move?
- Anything you need to change in yourself to make a better fit?
- Continuing to sharpen and hone skills

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### Making a Difference

- Finding Great Joy is about knowing you have made an impact
- Evaluate your practice (are you making a difference?, how do you know?)
- Are you good enough at what you do that it is impacting people's lives?
- Continuing education (formal and informal)
- Master your work, but keep on learning and growing

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### Purpose and Meaning

- Your own personal outcome measure!
- Does what you do matter?
- Is this what you are called to do?
- Where are you in your existential journey?
- What is the next step as far as vocation?

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### Attitudes and Coping Skills

- Realistic expectations
- Humbly (not too big or small)
  - Accept limits
  - Not controlling
  - Not forcing
- Rejoice in small things
- Don't make big deals out of small problems
- Know what matters
- Accept what you cannot change: Change what you can

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### Implications for Supervisors and Managers

- Create opportunities for social support among employees
- Help senior employees find ways to pass on their knowledge and experience with finding joy
- Give workers as much freedom and autonomy as possible to meet client needs
- Active mentoring of junior colleagues
- Celebrate uniqueness
- Be Joyful at work: it might just be contagious

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- Theologian Frederick Buechner describes joy as unpredictable as the One who bequeaths her. But wherever she comes from, one thing is certain: when she shows up, you'd best catch a dance with her as soon as possible. She's a gypsy, you see. She has no permanent address and you'll never persuade her to stay forever. But while you're dancing, you may well get the feeling that that moment, at least, is forever
- Howard Hanger says "Joy is unpredictable. Even capricious. You never really know when or where joy is going to make a showing. You can invite her, but she never sends an RSVP. You can set a place for her at the table, but she might end up catching a burger and fries and feel too full to join you."

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### Tools

- Jacqueline Kelm's 28 day experiment in increasing joy:
  - Daily gratitude list of 3 things you're grateful for
  - Answer the question: What's one thing I could today, no matter how small, to increase my joy?
  - Take a few minutes to close your eyes and picture the ideal unfolding of your day ahead.

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### Tools

- Barbara Frederickson, Ph.D.: work on the 3:1 ratio
  - <http://www.positivityratio.com/>

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**Participants**

- Think about a recent time you found great joy in your work
- Ponder how you find joy and how you can impact your workplace

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