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## Review of Wendy Ulrich's Presentation

Joseph Chamberlain

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# Physician, Heal Thyself: Moving From Pretense to Competence at Caring for Ourselves and Creating Meaning at Work

## PRESENTER

WENDY ULRICH

## EDITOR

JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN

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As Christ teaches his audience in Luke chapter 4, he addresses a latent suspicion of hypocrisy in those he teaches. “Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself” (Luke 4:23). The question in the minds of the audience being “who are you to call us to repentance? Are you not also a sinner?” While this question is an inaccurate assumption of the nature of the Savior, it is appropriately placed on those who practice psychotherapy. Just as we may counsel and instruct those who are overcoming any myriad of mental illness, diagnosis, and general dismay, we often find ourselves in a position not too different from the clients we support. Embracing this may be understood as a certain integrity to the practice; we, as doctors, are also in need of healing by virtue of simply being human.

It is in this spirit that Dr. Wendy Ulrich addressed the 2023 AMCAP Conference. *Physician, Heal Thyself* is ultimately aimed at practicing religious psychotherapists and encourages the audience to reframe their ideas of self-care and their relationship with their clients in relation to burnout. While those practicing are, by profession, largely focused on the client and those they assist, the self is an often neglected part of the equation. Burnout is often the consequence of a lack of proper self-care. Dr. Ulrich addresses three different forms of burnout, namely (1) burnout caused from increasing demands or diminishing resources, (2) historical, vicarious, and anticipatory trauma, (3) disorienting burnout that comes from a crisis of meaning. Rather than presenting any number of self-care procedures that involve isolation, distance, or removal from relationships and environments that are a necessary and intrinsic part of life, Dr. Ulrich encourages means of addressing burnout that can be conducted *within* our client relationships.

Dr. Ulrich appropriately addresses the relevant concern of burnout in an occupation weighed down by it in a way that is direct and nuanced. Practitioners (and, generally, all who experience burnout) are very familiar with failure and frustrations. This doesn't necessarily mean that our experience of burnout is evidence of failure, but it *is* evidence of a need for triage and introspection. It is important to note that suffering is not only inevitable, but a necessary component in existence. Condemning oneself for struggling is counterproductive and cannot produce the change needed for supporting the clients that may rely on their therapist.

A mode of understanding and accurately understanding a client (or ourselves) requires humility. Dr. Ulrich encouraged the audience to ask a neighbor for help with an issue of burnout and not to say “I've tried that” or “I've already heard this.” Instead, responding with gratitude will allow us to understand and hear feedback we receive.

Likewise, while engaged with clients, we can begin by asking, “What have you tried?” Doing so immediately positions the client as an agent who has and can take action to make a difference. It also provides immediate validation to the efforts done so far. Allowing for oneself to humbly accept and work with what the client has done to change creates an environment that allows trial and error in the experiment of recovery.

Practitioners need to allow human flaw and limitations in themselves while working in their cause to heal others from human flaw and limitation. Ultimately, an understanding, appreciation, and acceptance of suffering, as well as helping clients to become empowered rather than simply helped, are two major contributions for a practicing psychotherapist to engage in self-care while in relation to their clients. This provides an opportunity for Christ’s involvement in the client-practitioner relationship. Denying the inherent fallibility of humanity closes opportunities for Christ’s help. Acknowledging not only the client’s need to heal, but our own need to heal, allows us to be more intimately involved and engaged with our ability and capacity to help in an enriching, rather than degrading, way. Dr. Ulrich eloquently conveyed that truth and taught that Jesus Christ can magnify and multiply our efforts, if done in humility, acceptance, and love.