

AOSW 2026



Annual Conference

June 10-12, 2026

Portland Marriott Downtown Waterfront
Portland, Oregon USA

Pre-Conferences: June 9, 2026

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Trauma, The Body, & Healing in Cancer Care

Kristy Case, LCSW, OSW-C



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Effects of Trauma



Neuroplasticity



Resources for
Safety



Vicarious Trauma
& Burnout



Questions &
Connecting

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Effects of Trauma



TRAUMA IS
PHYSICAL



BRAIN "HARDWARE"



"LOW ROAD" VS.
"HIGH ROAD"



CHEMICAL
MARINATION

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Effects of Trauma

Social
Engagement:
Safe & Social

Fight/Flight:
Mobilized for
Survival

Freeze/Collapse:
Immobilized &
Shut Down

Polyvagal Ladder

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Neuroplasticity

From Damaged to Healing

Pruning & Sprouting

"Physical Therapy for the Brain"

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Resources of Safety

Vagal Reset

Social
Engagement
System/Co-
Regulation

Workplace
Considerations

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Burnout,

Vicarious
Trauma &

Clinician
Resilience



Signs of Burnout vs.
Vicarious Trauma



Strategies of Support for
Resilience

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REGULATION
SKILLS



BURNOUT
PREVENTION



BOOKS, WEBSITES
& TRAININGS

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Questions & Connecting

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Thank you!

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Tips, Tricks & Tools for Burnout Prevention

At the start of your workday, set an intention to look for one example of human adaptation or strength. This trains your brain to notice "growth" alongside "suffering."

After a challenging patient encounter, wash your hands with cold water or use a scented hand sanitizer. Use this physical sensation to mentally "leave" that patient's story in the room before moving to the next.

To quickly shift from a "fight-or-flight" state to a "rest-and-digest" state, take a deep double-inhale through the nose followed by a long, audible exhale through the mouth.

If you've been sitting and need a re-set, do a 30-second "shake out" of your limbs or a wall stretch to discharge stored physical tension.

When speaking with colleagues, use "Fair Warning." Ask, "*I need to debrief for a moment; do you have the bandwidth to hear it?*" This prevents spreading vicarious trauma to your peers.

When documenting in a chart, take ten seconds to note not just the patient's challenges, but the patient's specific coping mechanisms. What allowed them to endure? Recognizing their power reinforces your own belief in human capacity.

Set a specific "transition ritual" for the end of the day such as closing all browser tabs or physically turning off your work phone to signal to your brain that the clinical "portal" is closed.

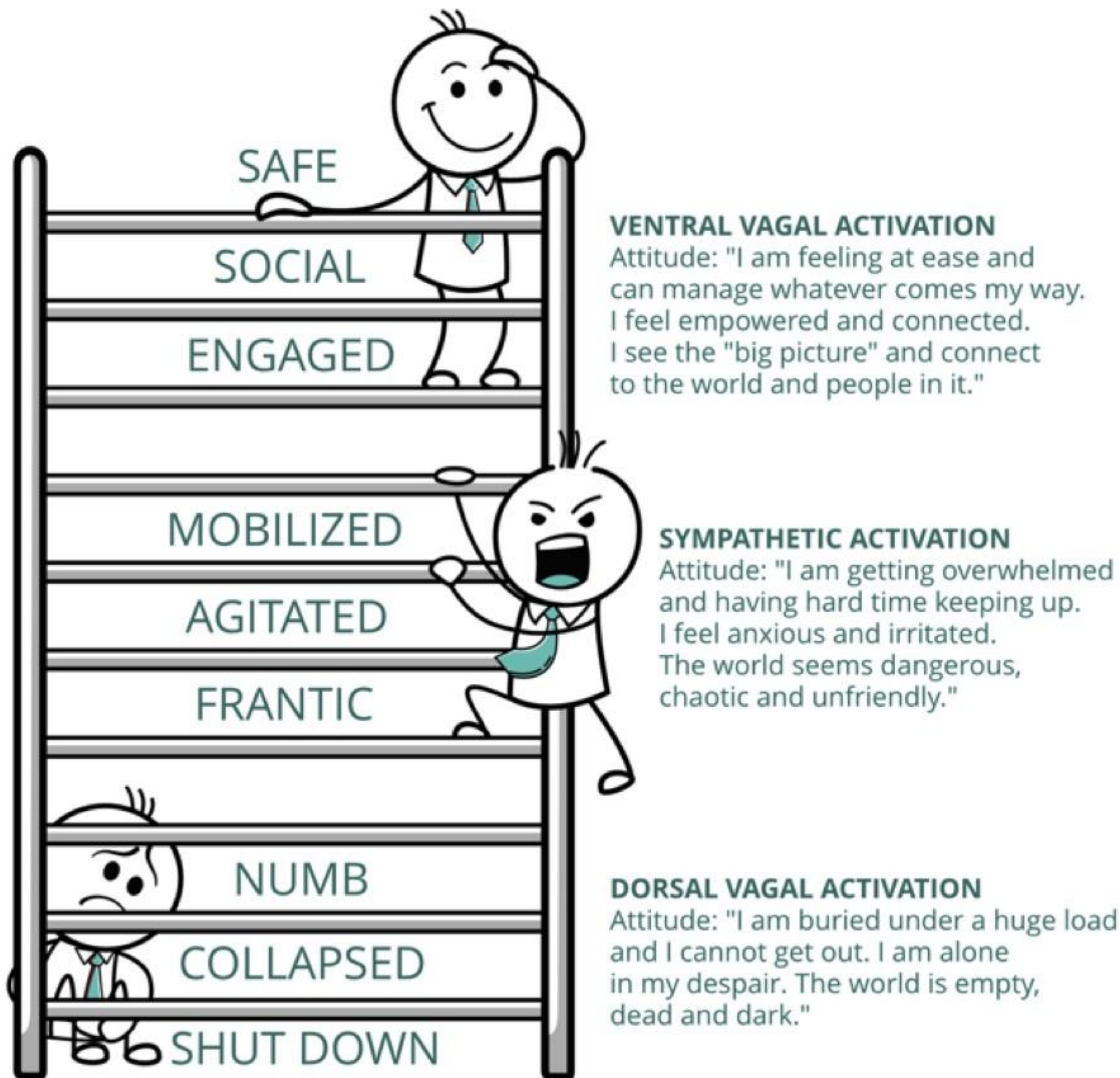
Celebrating the Victories: It can be a patient sharing their gratitude, a patient finishing treatment or a patient reclaiming a small sense of agency. Acknowledge these as professional successes.

At the end of your workday, reflect on:

1. What is one "quiet victory" or moment of human connection I witnessed today?
2. Am I carrying a specific patient's story home? If so, what physical ritual can I use to "leave" it at the door?
3. Practice shifting your internal goal from *fixing the outcome* (which is often out of your control in oncology) to *bearing witness to the experience*. How was I a co-regulator during my workday?

Use the [ProQOL \(Professional Quality of Life\) Scale](#) to check your balance of Compassion Satisfaction vs. Compassion Fatigue.

AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM AS A LADDER



Adapted from *The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy* by Deb Dana

Theoretical Foundations (Neuroscience & Theory)

- [Mindsight Institute](#): (Dan Siegel) Resources on interpersonal neurobiology.
- [Neurosequential Network](#): (Bruce Perry) Research on childhood trauma and brain development.
- [Polyvagal Institute](#): (Stephen Porges) Research on the Vagus nerve and therapeutic safety.
- [SAMHSA - Trauma-Informed Care](#): Comprehensive frameworks for organizational implementation.

Clinical Practice & Regulation Tools

- [Rhythm of Regulation](#): (Deb Dana) Clinical worksheets and Vagal regulation activities.
- [Self-Compassion.org](#): (Dr. Kristin Neff) Research-backed exercises to address trauma-related shame.

Professional Sustainability (Burnout & Resilience)

- [ProQOL \(Professional Quality of Life\) Scale](#): A free self-assessment for Compassion Satisfaction vs. Compassion Fatigue.
- [The Nap Ministry](#): (Tricia Hersey) Framing rest as a biological necessity and resistance against burnout.
- [Tend Academy](#): Resources from Laura van Dernoot Lipsey on vicarious trauma.

Readings

Polyvagal & Somatic Healing:

- *The Polyvagal Theory* – Stephen Porges
- *Anchored: How to Befriend Your Nervous System Using Polyvagal Theory* – Deb Dana
- *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma* – Peter Levine
- *In an Unspoken Voice* – Peter Levine

Neurobiology & Personal Growth:

- *The Brain That Changes Itself* – Norman Doidge
- *What Happened to You?* – Dr. Bruce Perry & Oprah Winfrey
- *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts* – Gabor Maté
- *My Grandmother's Hands* – Resmaa Menakem

Training & Expert Perspectives

- [NICABM](#): webinars on the clinical application of behavioral medicine and neuroscience.
- [Somatic Experiencing International](#): Professional SE training programs.
- [PESI](#): Broad CE catalog for trauma and vicarious trauma.
- [Dr. Nadine Burke Harris](#) (ACEs and toxic stress)
- [Dr. Tracey Marks](#) (Mental health education)

Somatic Exercise Menu

These exercises help shift the nervous system towards **Ventral Vagal (Safe/Social)** state.

The Oculocardiac Reflex

- Interlace your fingers behind your head. Keeping your head still, look as far right as possible with just your eyes. Hold until you feel a spontaneous yawn, sigh, or swallow (usually 30–60 seconds). Repeat on the left side.

This exercise relaxes the suboccipital muscles and stimulates the vagus nerve to slow the heart rate and signal safety.

Ear Tugging (Auricular Stimulation)

- Gently grasp the "bowl" of your outer ear (the concha) with your thumb and forefinger. Pull very gently outward and slightly backward. Hold for 1 minute while taking slow, soft breaths.

Targets the auricular branch of the vagus nerve to decrease physical tension in the chest and throat.

Neck Stretch

- Drop your right ear toward your right shoulder. Without moving your head, look up and to the left with your eyes. Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat on the opposite side.

This exercise combines eye movement with a neck stretch to release the "bracing" response often held in the upper spine.

Resonated "Voo" Breathing

- Take a slow breath in. On the exhale, make a low, steady "Voooooo" sound. Focus on the vibration in your chest and belly. Prolong the exhale as long as possible.

The vibration stimulates the vagus nerve in the throat.

Quick Tools

- 4,7,8 Breathing
- 5 Senses Activation
 - Sweet/Salty/Sour candy
 - Aromatherapy
 - Theta waves/Binaural beats

- Acute Cold Exposure