

Addressing Cumulative Grief as an Interdisciplinary Palliative Care Team

Dr. Howard Tuch, MD

Rev. Amy Santamaria, MDiv, BCC

Rev. Jakob Hero, MDiv, MA

Jennifer Cacioppo, LCSW

Learning Objectives

Learning Objectives

1.) Participants will identify the unique burden of cumulative grief carried by physicians, nurses, social workers, chaplains, and other healthcare professionals

Learning Objectives

2.) Participants will complete a grief inventory activity and gain competency in administering similar tools with colleagues

Learning Objectives

3.) Participants will expand their set of resources for processing and coping with grief and preventing compassion fatigue

Introduction

Introduction

Who we are:

Introduction

Who we are:

- Tampa General Hospital

Introduction

Who we are:

- Tampa General Hospital
 - 1,000 bed facility

Introduction

Who we are:

- Tampa General Hospital
 - 1,000 bed facility
 - Level-one trauma center

Introduction

Who we are:

- Tampa General Hospital
 - 1,000 bed facility
 - Level-one trauma center
 - Regional burn center

Introduction

Who we are:

- Tampa General Hospital
 - 1,000 bed facility
 - Level-one trauma center
 - Regional burn center
 - Palliative care program

Introduction

Who we are:

- Palliative Care Team

Introduction

Who we are:

- Palliative Care Team
 - 1 fulltime physician

Introduction

Who we are:

- Palliative Care Team
 - 1 fulltime physician
 - 3-4 (rotating) medical fellows

Introduction

Who we are:

- Palliative Care Team
 - 1 fulltime physician
 - 3-4 (rotating) medical fellows
 - Chaplains

Introduction

Who we are:

- Palliative Care Team
 - 1 fulltime physician
 - 3-4 (rotating) medical fellows
 - Chaplains
 - 3 part time/ 1 chaplain fellow

Introduction

Who we are:

- Palliative Care Team
 - 1 fulltime physician
 - 3-4 (rotating) medical fellows
 - Chaplains
 - 3 part time/ 1 chaplain fellow
 - 1 social worker

Introduction

Who we are:

- Palliative Care Team
 - 1 fulltime physician
 - 3-4 (rotating) medical fellows
 - Chaplains
 - 3 part time/ 1 chaplain fellow
 - 1 social worker
 - 2 Nurse Practitioners

Introduction

Who we are:

- Palliative Care Team
 - 1 fulltime physician
 - 3-4 (rotating) medical fellows
 - Chaplains
 - 3 part time/ 1 chaplain fellow
 - 1 social worker
 - 2 Nurse Practitioners
 - 2 nurses/ support staff

Introduction

Who we are:

- Palliative Care Team
 - 1 fulltime physician
 - 3-4 (rotating) medical fellows
 - Chaplains
 - 3 part time/ 1 chaplain fellow
 - 1 social worker
 - 2 Nurse Practitioners
 - 2 nurses/ support staff
 - 1 Patient Care Tech

Grief

“[I]n health care, where loss is a daily event both for patients and caregivers, disenfranchised grief is an understudied phenomenon (Papadatou, 2009). Most professional understandings of stress and grief in the workplace usually refer to burnout or compassion fatigue, rather than grief explicitly.”

S. Spidell, et al. (2011) Grief in Healthcare Chaplains: An investigation of the Presence of Disenfranchised Grief. *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy*, 17:75-86.

Grief as a Profession



“Cumulative grief was experienced as an awareness of inner pain, brought about by many losses sustained over long periods without satisfactory closure.”

P. H. Boston, B. M. Mount (2006). The Caregiver's Perspective on Existential and Spiritual Distress in Palliative Care. *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* 32 (1) 13- 26.

Why talk about grief?



“I think we absorb a lot of sadness that we can’t possibly acknowledge... Because we are caregivers, we feel we should be able to handle difficult things. We encourage others to just spill their guts and just say how they are feeling and yet we really deny ourselves that opportunity to really express the losses we have been through... I’ve paid the price for it. I think my body was full of sadness.”

P. H. Boston, B. M. Mount (2006). The Caregiver’s Perspective on Existential and Spiritual Distress in Palliative Care. *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* 32 (1) 13- 26.



An inventory of grief

A new approach to the sacred story of
your relationship to grief

- How many patients do you see in a week who are
 - Actively dying?
 - Have a prognosis of less than 6 months?
 - Have just received a terminal diagnosis?
- How often are you physically present at the bedside of a person as he or she dies?

What other stressors bring grief into your work?

- Tension among staff / interdisciplinary tension
- Colleagues leaving
- Repetitive exposure to suffering
- Loss of meaning-making
- Challenges to our own belief systems
- Outside stressors, personal struggles

Some symptoms of unresolved grief

- Unwarranted anger toward spouse/
partner
- Impatience with children
- Feelings that you shouldn't or can't
process your day
- Crying on your commute
- Isolating from others
- Somatic impact of this work

Reflection

As you think of the losses and the grief of your work, how do you feel in your body right now?

Reflection

What do you want to say to
your grief?



Honoring and tending grief

“[H]ealth care professionals will provide better care and support to seriously ill [patients] and their families when they feel supported personally and professionally in their work.”

C. Hylton Rushton, et al. (2006). Interdisciplinary Interventions to Improve Pediatric Palliative Care and Reduce Health Care Professional Suffering. *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, 9 (4), 922- 933.

Addressing Grief as a Team

“Throughout the implementation of the action plan, the voices of suffering became more audible, perhaps because participants were invited to acknowledge it and name it, and respond to it rather than deny or repress it.”

C. Hylton Rushton, et al. (2006). Interdisciplinary Interventions to Improve Pediatric Palliative Care and Reduce Health Care Professional Suffering. *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, 9 (4), 922- 933.

Honoring and tending grief

- Established interdisciplinary network to support palliative and end of life care
- Palliative care rounds- in which staff needs were part of the assessment
- Patient care conferences
- Bereavement debriefings

Rituals to Honor Grief





I HONOR THE MANY FACETS OF YOUR GRIEF

There are
many things
that can
only be
seen
through
eyes that
have cried.

Óscar Romero

