

COVID-19 Bereavement Considerations

June 1, 2020

We know this is a particularly difficult time in society to experience the death of a loved one. Not being able to be present and changes in traditions following a death can impact the grief response.

As health care providers, you have become family for these dying patients. Holding their hands, gazing into their eyes and providing that comforting presence is a gift beyond measure – as hard as it is.

Considering all this, there is a toll that this takes on the body, mind and spirit. Health care providers are experiencing multiple losses during this pandemic. There is the loss of safety and normalcy. Uncertainty abounds. There is the death of patients. There is the risk of exposure and the possible need to isolate yourself from personal family members. The list of losses goes on and on.

You may be able to compartmentalize your work right now, but you may experience a delayed grief reaction. Symptoms for grief and loss could build up and surprise you unexpectedly. Many experience ambiguous losses. These losses lack clarity and a definition. They are different from the point of a single death. In fact, many do not know what they are grieving or what is making them sad.

Examples of grief reactions:

- Deep sadness or depression
- Difficulty with concentration
- Fatigue/sleeplessness
- Irritability/mood swings
- Less attention to detail
- Personality changes
- Withdrawal from others
- Decreased motivation

What can help:

- Acknowledge feelings of loss
- Give yourself permission to grieve
- Practice self-care
- Maintain social connections
- Find a moment of calm within the chaos of the day
- Contact your local hospice program to access their bereavement services to support your team and your patients' loved ones
- Contact your hospital-based palliative care team
- Contact your EAP

Special thanks to Diane Snyder Cowan and Hospice of the Western Reserve Grief Services.