

Acknowledging Staff Grief When Working with Dementia: It Is Vital

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Key Learning Objectives

1. To understand how staff grief and loss impacts on their work with people with dementia in a variety of settings.
2. To hear examples of organizations and peer-led strategies to support staff when a person with dementia dies.
3. To provide clarity on the purpose of peer lead debriefings.
4. To increase awareness of the importance of self care and provide examples of self care techniques.



Dementia and Staff Grief: What's the Big Deal?

Have you ever heard (or thought??) any of these things about working with people who have dementia...

- For me, Joe was gone years ago. His physical death was just the 'official' end of his life.
- When I decided to take this job, surely I expected to lose clients.
- My colleagues never seem to show any emotion when a client dies. Didn't they come to care about them over all those years?
- If you cry over every client, you will never last. You've got to protect yourself.



Ambiguous Loss - Grief of Dementia

- differs from the loss and grief of death
- closure is not possible and grief cannot be fully resolved until the person with dementia dies
- person with dementia is present, not as before
- still maintain a core of self that we know can be reached at all stages of the disease but different



The Alzheimer Society of Canada heard from people working with individuals living with dementia.....

- This work you are doing on ambiguous loss and grief is great but.....
- What about MY grief?? What help do you have to offer ME?



I remember one of my favourite residents had died and the next day that I worked another man was in his bed. I had such a hard time knowing he would not be there, let alone looking at someone else in that bed. These people become like family to us...then it was like they did not even exist ...not a fingerprint left.

Jackie PSW working in LTC



How staff grief and loss can impact quality of care....

- Direct Care Providers: major consequence is...

COMPASSION FATIGUE

- physical, emotional, and spiritual exhaustion that can affect the ability to feel and care for others
- can lead to creating an emotional distance from clients as a 'self protection' mechanism and/or chronic sadness, lack of energy and enthusiasm



How staff grief can impact employers/leaders....

- reduced quality of care
- particularly end of life care → impact on residents and families as well as staff
- higher rates of staff turnover and absence
- lower morale - lack of enthusiasm, innovation, reduced sense of teamwork
- greater risk of long term staff health problems



Peer-Led Debriefings: Acknowledging Grief

- This sub-study project is part of a much larger five-year research project called ***Improving Quality of Life for People Dying in Long-Term Care Homes.***
- Utilizing a community capacity development approach, specific aims of the project are:
 - To develop inter-professional palliative care programs
 - Create partnerships between LTC homes, community organizations and researchers
 - Create a toolkit for developing palliative care in LTC homes that can be shared nationally
 - Promote the role of the PSW in palliative care.

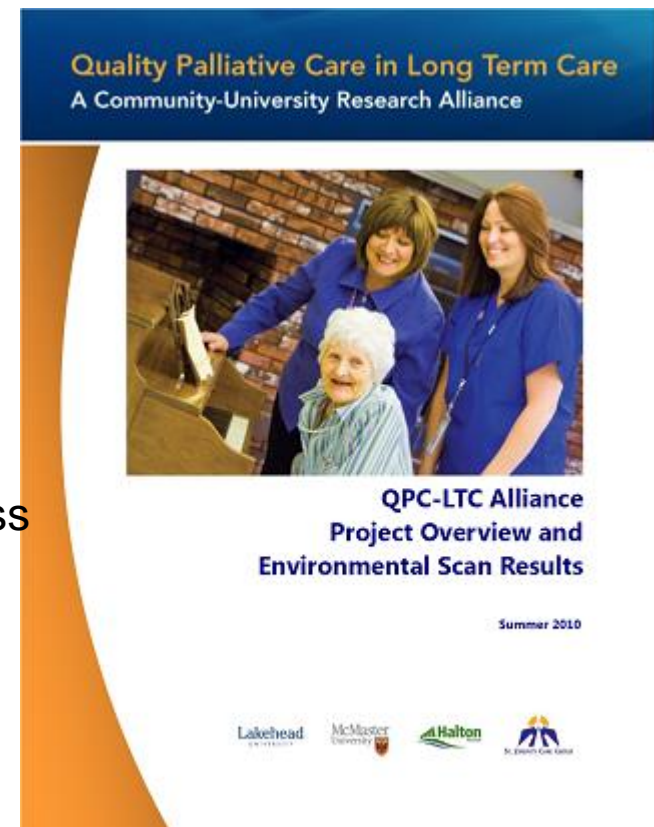


Background of Peer-Led Debriefings

- 2009 Environmental scan
 - staff reports experiencing tremendous loss and grief when a patient dies
- Marcella (2012) Sub study
 - staff require education and access to resources in the work place
 - management should acknowledge staff loss

Jill Marcella, Research Project Manager,
Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, Ontario

www.palliativealliance.ca



What Is A Peer Led Debriefing

- Acknowledging our loss
- Acknowledging and supporting our coworkers' grief
- An intervention that acknowledges staff's loss
- All participants in a debriefing process respond differently
- Everybody responds differently



Key Ingredients Successful Debriefing

- Education
- Safe environment
- Meaning making
- Team strengthening
- Important to re-count experience



Assisting Someone Who Has Been Involved in a Death/Loss

- Listen
- Validate
- Ask them what they need
- Don't judge
- Do only what you can
- Don't provide platitudes
- Help them find their strengths
- Encourage them to seek help



Things to Avoid

Conversations involving:

- Blame/scape-goating
- Past trauma
- Escalating anger
- Expert advice giving
- “What if” scenarios



Direction For the Debriefer

- Recognize your own limitations
 - Be able and willing to say no to a debriefing request
- Debrief in teams when ever possible
 - Know your partner, know your role
- Be prepared
 - Preparation is the key to a successful debriefing
- Set realistic goals regarding the debriefing process
 - Everything works well in theory – expect the unexpected
- Post Debriefing Self Care
 - Engage in a post debriefing process
 - Education
 - Self care/validation



Before You Engage In Debriefing... Do You Know?

- Details of the death of the resident
- Details of the resident who has died
- Who will be participating in the debriefing?
- How many prior resident deaths this team has experienced?
- Are there any family/unresolved issues that are of concern?



Disenfranchised Grief Debriefing (DGD) Approach

- Response time within 24 hours
- Stabilization key goal
- Natural coping mechanisms are in place
- Normalize physical and emotional responses
- Assist participants in separating themselves from the event



ININPUT Model

Jo-Ann Vis, Professor of Social Work
Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, Ontario

- **I** -- information regarding death
- **N** -- need to do
- **N** -- need to say
- **P** -- plan
- **U** -- understanding
- **T**-- thank You



Benefits

- Reminds us of the funny stories, the lessons we learned and recognizes our feelings of gratitude
- Peer-led debriefings acknowledges a death of a resident, acknowledges our loss and to help staff grieve this death.
- It helps staff understand that we do our very best, to care for our residents until their death and that it is just as important to care for ourselves.



“ A peer-led debriefing is like the period at the end of a sentence. You have to have it or the grief just goes on.”



Strategies for organization and peer-led support for staff...

1. Job orientation
2. Specialized education and training
3. Formal and informal grief support programs and initiatives
4. Rituals and ceremonies



Self Care Techniques for Staff

1. Acknowledge and normalize your own feelings of loss
2. Talk informally with co-workers with whom you are most comfortable to share your grief experience.
3. Reminiscing and expressing your feelings can help resolve grief.
4. Seek out support through formal debriefing sessions with a supervisor, team and/or professional counsellor
5. Reflect on what you give and what you get when providing quality end of life care
6. Practice relaxation techniques



Self Care Techniques (con't)

5. Advocate for a peer support program or other organizational staff grief support initiatives
6. Ask to attend the funeral or memorial service
7. Contribute to a book of memories
8. Write an article for a staff newsletter, remembering the client/resident
9. Say your own private “goodbye”

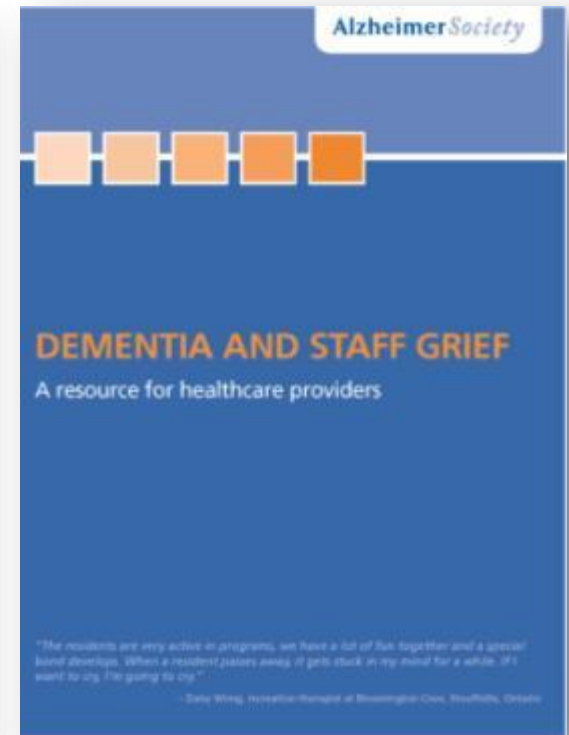
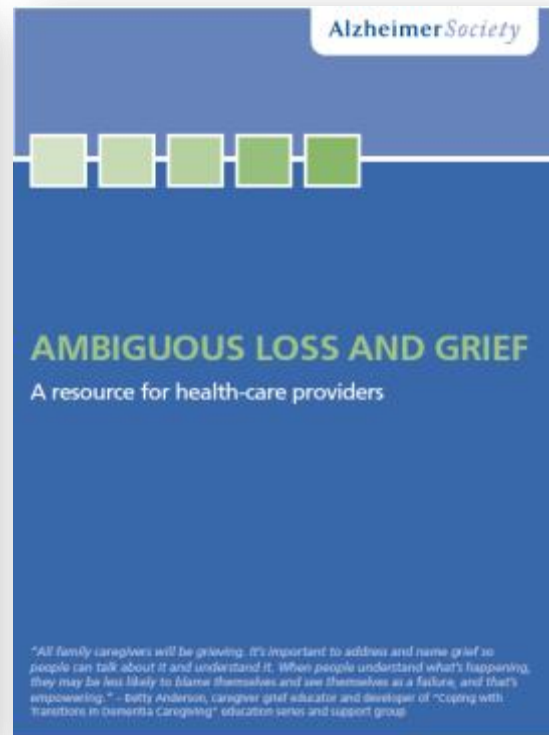
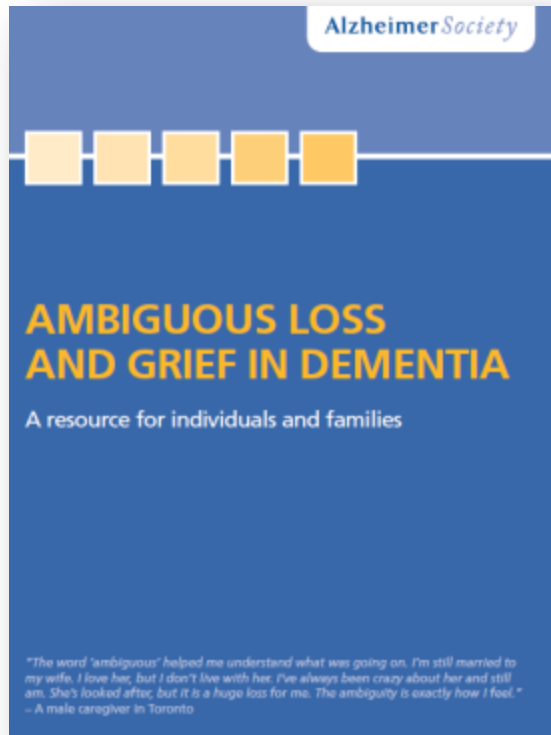


When Evelyn died...I didn't attend the funeral. Her son brought in a basket of plants to thank the staff. I brought home a plant and it's grown into a tree. That was 14 years ago. It's a memento of that particular lady. She has a soft spot in my heart."

Ron program worker Alzheimer day program



Resources:



English: www.alzheimer.ca/healthcareprofessionals

French: www.alzheimer.ca/professionnelssdelasante



Learn more about **dementia and staff grief**, please visit the Alzheimer Society of Canada website www.alzheimer.ca

Learn more about **quality palliative care in long term care**, please visit www.palliativealliance.ca

Thank you for your kind attention!



Questions

