

ECHO IDAHO

Behavioral Health in Primary Care

Supporting Patients and Providers Through Death and Dying

4/15/2026

Jeremy Stockett, LCSW - St. Lukes/Finch and Fox Therapy Group

Chad Freeman, LMSW – Finch and Fox Therapy Group

None of the planners or presenters for this educational activity have relevant financial relationship(s) to disclose with ineligible companies whose primary business is producing, marketing, selling, re-selling, or distributing healthcare products used by or on patients.



University of Idaho
School of Health and Medical
Professions



Content Warning

This presentation contains discussions regarding **death, grief, and suicide**. Some of the material may be emotionally difficult.

Prioritizing well-being throughout the session is encouraged. Please feel free to step away or take a break at any time if necessary.

Learning Objectives

- Foundations of Grief
- Caring For the Dying
- Caring For Those Left Living
- Caring For Those Caring

Foundations of Grief

Generalities about the grieving person in your office

- Screening for safety concerns is of first importance
- They are in one of the stages (cycles) of grief
- They have some confusion about the process of dying
- The nature of the thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that make up their *grief* should not be immediately pathologized

Stages of Grief

- Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance (DABDA)
- These stages are not linear and are often recycled as time passes
- Any emotion can happen at any stage
- “Meaning Making” has been called the 6th stage of grief
- This model of grief is not the totality of grief or the person grieving

Confusion about the process of dying

- Questions about the physical dying process they might not know how to ask
- Questions about the clinical and legal processes surrounding death
- Questions about your role during and after
- Knowing and finding the right resources

Don't Pathologize Grief or Culture

- Grief is messy and doesn't always abide by the medical model in which they seek care
- Be mindful of cultural or spiritual understandings that might be different than your own
- Let compassion and curiosity be your guide as you apply care to you grieving patient

Caring For the Dying

Helping the patient embrace the business of dying before dying embraces them.

- Getting their affairs in order
- Conversations worth having
- Finding acceptance and meaning

Getting Their Affairs in Order

When it's possible, knowing their business and financial affairs are properly accounted for, gives the dying more space to find acceptance and peace about their death

Resource:

I'm Dead, Now What? Planner - Important Information about My Belongings, Business Affairs, and Wishes

Peter Pauper Press

Conversations Worth Having

Five conversations that can advance peace and acceptance for those dying:

Asking for forgiveness

Offering forgiveness

Offering heartfelt thanks

Offering sentiments of love

Saying goodbye

Resource:

The Four Things That Matter Most 10th Anniversary Edition: A Book About Living

Ira Byock MD

Case Example

Jenny:

45-year-old client “preparing” for her husband’s death of colon cancer.

Offering sentiments of love:

“While you still can, tell us what you have always shown us.”

Finding Acceptance & Meaning

Finding a level of acceptance about their death allows the meaning of their life to become more significant at the end

Forgiveness

Giving up on the hope for a better past.

Healing

Coming to terms with things as they are (Jon Kabat Zinn).

Acceptance

Acknowledging things as they are. Acceptance does not mean you're happy that things turned out this way, only that you are letting go of wishing it had gone differently.

Resources:

5 Regrets of the Dying

Caregivers Nova Scotia

Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief

David Kessler

Key Points for Caring For the Dying

- When it's possible, knowing their business and financial affairs are properly accounted for, gives the dying more space to find acceptance and peace about their death
- Having conversations about forgiveness, gratitude, love, and saying goodbye is a gift worth giving and receiving
- Finding a level of acceptance about their death allows the meaning of their life to become more significant at the end

Caring For Those Left Living

Helping the family and friends prepare for and process the death of a loved one

- Getting their affairs in order when possible
- Conversations worth having before and after death
- Making sense of the mess - finding acceptance and meaning

Getting Their Affairs in Order

Having business and financial affairs properly accounted for, gives the bereaved more space to grieve

Funeral arrangements, caregiving, financial adjustments, and employment requirements drain the emotional tank of the bereaved, leaving little space for the grieving process.

**Prolonged Autopilot/Overdrive + Lack of selfcare or being cared for =
Prolonged grief (or more)**

Resource:

I'm Dead, Now What? Planner - Important Information about My Belongings, Business Affairs, and Wishes

Peter Pauper Press

Case Example

Linda:

60-year-old daughter who is overextended by the tasks of being the unofficial executor of her father's will.

- Avoidance of reminders that her dad died
- Difficulty reintegrating into her relationships and activities after the death. Couldn't make plans.
- Emotional numbness because of the death.
- Feeling that life is meaningless.
- Intense loneliness.

“I can't make sense of everything that needs to be done.”

Conversations Worth Having

Having conversations about forgiveness, gratitude, love, and saying goodbye is a gift worth giving and receiving.

Asking for forgiveness

Offering forgiveness

Offering heartfelt thanks

Offering sentiments of love

Having these conversations with an empty chair can lead to acceptance and meaning making

Case Example

George:

60-year-old widower grieving the sudden death of his wife of 20 years

“I can’t forgive myself for being so angry with her for not taking better care of herself.”

“If she were sitting here with us, what would you say to her now?”

Making Sense of the Mess

Honesty and self compassion lead to acceptance lasting lasting meaning

Bereaved need help:

- Navigating the “new normal”
- Making sense of difficult memories, thoughts, and emotions they label as “wrong” “inexcusable” (guilt and shame)

Resource:

A Monster Calls

Patrick Ness

Case Example

George:

“You aren’t supposed to be angry with your dead wife! She’s the one who was in pain, not me!”

“Why not? I get angry with people who do things that hurt the people I care about.”

Key Points for Caring Those Left Living

- Having business and financial affairs properly accounted for, gives the bereaved more space to grieve
- Having conversations about forgiveness, gratitude, love, and saying goodbye is a gift worth giving and receiving
- Honesty and self compassion lead to acceptance and lasting meaning

Caring For Those Caring

1. Caring for the individual provider
2. Caring for the team
3. Caring for the agency/system

The grieving provider

- What does the grieving provider need?
 - To remain human
 - To care for self and others appropriately
- What are the provider's own expectations?
 - Safety/fear
 - Guilt/shame
 - The standard of care
- What is the provider's own relationship with grief?
 - Personal Experiences
 - Cultural components

Case Example

Grieving provider:

“What do I do!?”

“You are allowed to grieve. You must stay human.”

The grieving team

- What does a grieving team need?

- Support/Safety
- Structure
- To remain a team

*The critical incident debrief (this could be an entire session)

Case Example

Grieving team:

“What happened?”

“We lost a patient. We are going to debrief together”

The grieving system/agency

- What does a grieving system/agency need?
 - Support/safety
 - This looks different at different levels of the organization
 - Structure
 - This also looks different at varying levels

*Postvention (this could be an entire session)

Case Example

Grieving system:

“We need to do right by everyone”

“Let’s make sure our people are okay and we met the standard of care”

Key Points in caring for caregivers

- In an agency setting:
 - 1. Grief occurs in layers
 - A. Individual
 - B. Team
 - C. System/Agency

Planning ahead can give you a road map

Questions/Discussion

- Questions?
- Thank you!

References

- Pauper, P. (2015). *I'm Dead, Now What! Organizer*. Peter Pauper Press.
- Kubler-Ross, E. (1969). *On Death and Dying*. Macmillan Pub. Co.
- Byock, I. (2014). *The four things that matter most - 10th anniversary edition : a book about living*. Atria Books.
- *Communication During Chronic Illness and End-of-Life | Caregivers Nova Scotia*. (2025). Caregiversns.org.
<https://caregiversns.org/resources/peolc/communication/>
- Kessler, D. (2020). *Finding Meaning: the sixth stage of grief*. Simon and Schuster.
- Ness, P. (2013). *A Monster Calls*. Turtleback Books.