

Abstract

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## **THE GRIEVING PROCESS: HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS ASSESSING AND ADDRESSING GRIEF**

Grief is a complex process of adjusting to significant loss in one's life. Those who have been diagnosed with a life-threatening illness such as cancer, suffer multiple losses as they journey from the initial diagnosis to remission or death. Healthcare professionals as well as family members and significant others related to patients also experience loss as they accompany them.

Grieving persons experience a wide variety of reactions to their losses, such as shock, anger and even relief. Exhaustion, behavioral changes, mood swings and even a lack of focus can characterize those who are grieving. Healthcare professionals need to assess their patients to determine if their responses are within the norm and whether or not they are using appropriate coping strategies. Learning as much about their patients and families as possible is essential for effective assessment. Addressing grief requires that healthcare professionals offer quality, compassionate care and provide for the presence of a supportive network. In addition, they need to attend to the body/mind/spirit relationship of their patients by offering them alternative ways of working with their grief, such as counseling, religious practices, guided imagery, art and music therapy, journaling and healing touch. Healthcare professionals need to develop their own coping strategies as they work with cancer patients. Working collaboratively with other team members, attending to their own physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs and recognizing signs of burnout in themselves, can benefit their patients as well as themselves.