

## Grief and Bereavement

### Background

This document summarizes the following presentations found on the BC Renal website:

1. End of Life: Supporting Grief and Bereavement, LINK: [Grief and Bereavement](#)
2. The Bereavement Call or Letter, LINK: [Bereavement Call and Letter](#)

### Definitions

**Grief** describes the response to any type of loss.

**Bereavement** is **grief** that involves the death of a loved one.

### Bereavement/Death Follow-Up

- Use a bereavement checklist that contains details of all the necessary steps (see below)
- Ensure that the surviving family/friends are aware of community supports for managing grief and bereavement in a healthy way. This includes information on local hospices, support groups and bereavement counseling services (local and national organizations).
- Consider ways to acknowledge the patient's death. This could include a notice in the waiting room, posting obituaries and/or placement of a ritual flower arrangement or card by the nursing station. Other options include a yearly memorial service, to which family and friends are invited.
- Consider sending the family a condolence card or letter of sympathy. Some units send families an anniversary of death card in the first year.
- Consider that it may be important for some of the renal staff to attend patients' funeral/memorial services.
- Create opportunities for staff to discuss and reflect upon recently deceased patients in a respectful non-judgmental environment
- Ensure that staff is aware of bereavement and counseling services through employee assistance program.

- Look for opportunities to expand knowledge and expertise of staff through continuing education on death/dying topics.

## Suggested Bereavement Check-List

- Follow-up phone call
- Condolence card sent
- Family consent to sharing death with fellow dialysis patients
- Notify the family physician
- If appropriate, offer to the family/loved ones:
  - Handouts / leaflets
  - BC Bereavement Helpline & other counseling/ grief support resources
  - Local Hospice Society resources
  - Specialist areas – children, teenagers, mental health resources

## Suggested Script When Telephoning a Loved One

Hello \_\_\_\_\_ (Ms/Mr)

This is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am calling from \_\_\_\_\_ hospital. I was your wife/husband/partner's \_\_\_\_\_ (MD/SW/RN).

The purpose of my call is to offer my condolences to you and your family after the death/passing of \_\_\_\_\_.

It has been/was a privilege to have been associated with the care of \_\_\_\_\_ for the last \_\_\_\_\_ months/years. I have been impressed by their strength in the face of their illness and the dignified way in which they faced the final stages of their life. This has been an inspiration to me, my colleagues, and the other patients who so valued their association with \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_ will be missed by their kidney care family.

## Suggested Script When Writing a Condolence Letter

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I felt that I wanted to write to you because I have been thinking increasingly about your late \_\_\_\_\_ (wife/husband/mother/father/sister/brother) as I walk through the halls of \_\_\_\_\_ hospital/dialysis unit.

I fondly remember \_\_\_\_\_'s courage and humour despite the seriousness of their illness. I remember too, their unfailing love of the work they did and how \_\_\_\_\_ (add something memorable about the patient).

\_\_\_\_\_’s strength has left an indelible memory and has once again taught me how the human spirit can overcome almost all adversity.

I hope that you and your remarkable family are finding your own strength to overcome your loss.

With fondest regards.

Yours sincerely,

## Tips

- Acknowledge the loss and name the deceased.
- Recall a memory of the deceased
- Use the deceased's name
- Acknowledge the death – “I am sorry \_\_\_\_ is gone”
- Talk about the deceased and memories, ask about “What are you remembering about \_\_\_\_ today?”
- Bring closure to the death “Do you have questions about \_\_\_\_’s final illness or treatment?”
- Talk about grief feelings: “How has \_\_\_\_’s death affected you?”
- “I am sorry”
- “It must be hard for you”
- “What would be most useful right now?”
- “Do you want to talk about it?”
- “Do you have someone you would like me to call?”
- “What do you miss most about \_\_\_\_\_?”
- “What would you like me to do for you?”
- “What are your supports?”
- Offer help, but be specific and be prepared to follow through

## Clichés to avoid

- “I understand” or “It’s for the best”
- “There was a reason” or “It’s God’s will”
- “I know how you feel”
- “Time heals”
- “You will get over it”
- Avoid giving examples of those who are “worse off”
- Disallowing loved one's feelings “You should be getting over this by now”