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Stages of Death

Being responsible for a person’s life is never an easy job. The time and effort that is put into school to prepare a caregiver is nothing compared to working a cardiac arrest or trauma, that often involves a death. The one thing that is not taught in school is how to handle grief for the caregivers and families of a patient. These experiences are often acquired through the work experience.

When caregivers go rushing on scene the things taught in school are forgotten. There is so much going on, with all the other people on scene. Caregivers may find it hard to concentrate on the patient. Healthcare professionals find themselves thrusted into one of the most intimate, emotional situations imaginable – an invader powerless to stop what’s coming. There are many different stages of grief that providers will go through. Healthcare providers may never get used to death but here are some different responses that caregivers have deal with over the span of my career. The different processes in these stages come at different times. Another issue when dealing with the different stages of death are culture and religion.

A loved one dying is never going to go “smoothly”, but as professionals, they must be sensitive to the psychological needs of other providers, families, and patients. It is important to understand emotional reactions of all involved. Death reminds healthcare providers of their own limitations. The loss of a patient will force them to remember the pain and disillusions they may have felt every time this happens. There might be a situation where humor can be used to help with dealing with death. Frustration and anger are sometimes experienced because they feel like they didn’t do enough. After each call they try to sit back and reflect on the situation and critique their own actions. Sometimes it’s easy for the provider to forget their own welfare or state of mind, it takes a while for the adrenaline to wear off. Most the time they’re too busy looking after everyone who’s around and they forget about their partner’s feelings, and how they are dealing with the death. Checking on a partner is as import as being there for the families. Providers are experiencing the grieving process as well.

When dealing with the family’s providers have to remind themselves of the different reactions the public should expect from them. Some families will be fine with the death because it was expected. They have prepared themselves for it. These stages of grief are going to move a little faster than as a family member that passes away unexpectedly. There are times they will have major break downs. Families will scream out, fall to the ground, or beg healthcare professional to do more. There will be guilt or blame because they think they didn’t do enough to help save that person. Some people will become angrier at providers because they think not enough was done to help their loved ones. Some of the families will want everything done in attempts to save their loved one. If the relationship with the deceased was difficult, this adds another process to the stage. It may take some time and thought before the families are able to process their passing. Loss is understood as a natural part of life, but families will be overcome with shock and confusion. This can lead to prolong periods of depression. They will often experience pain and will not know what to do. I have been the person on scene to guide the families on what to do. Most will not know how to pick up and move on without their loved one and have feeling of emptiness. Providers will try and comfort the families as much as possible, sometimes this is the hardest part of their job. Watching the person completely fall apart and not being able to do anything to help them is hard.

Their world has been that family member and they are going to have a hard time dealing with the loss. Notifying someone that their loved one has passed away is uncomfortable and difficult. Providers have discovered that when breaking the news to the family, medical jargon shouldn’t be used. This only confuses them and causes more frustration. Families will notice attitude and demeanor more than words. Tone of voice and posture are important during this time. Compassion and empathy should be showed when talking with families. Providers have found that being honest with families is always the best approach in this situation.

Alone with the stages of death that everyone goes through coping is an important stage that should not be forgotten. The bottom line to dealing with death is to develop positive coping skills. Providers have found that taking vacations, reading books, exercising, or even just talking helps. Since providers have developed some of these skills, they can help others with their feelings. Providers can recommend ways to help with coping. Most people will recover from the loss in a natural way, it just takes time. Providers have found that some people might need the help of a professional to overcome the death. The important part is that the feelings are being dealt with.

Death is a natural part of life. Every one of these stages have been witnessed by myself or partner at some point. Whether providers have seen them the night the death occurred or are called back to the scene weeks later. Even providers endure these emotions and stages during their careers. None of them are ever the same. Depending on what they are going through, depends on which stage they will experience, and for how long they will deal with it. Grieving is an important process to overcome the death. The most important part of experiencing this is to remind themselves that, everyone handles death different. There is not one person out there will go through the same stages at the same time. It is important for families to pull together and help one another out during this sad time.