Merging Lanes: Personal Loss in the Professional Setting

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Hope

Hope is the belief that one hand reaching to another can eventually touch the moon allowing the light to guide us through the night.

Nicholas Mazza
Hospice work ...

- Presence in pain and suffering—physical, emotional and spiritual
- Assistance in alleviating suffering and pain
- Working within family systems
- Requires complete attention
- A profession that others have a difficult time relating to
Work Environment
Stressors

- Increased workload
- Inadequate time with patients and families
- Constant exposure to death and its emotional impact
- Professional grief
What are our “lenses” made of

- Our personal life experiences
- Our values and judgment
- Our physical well being
- Our emotional well being
- Our current life stressors
What we see through our lenses impacts our perception.

Objects in mirror may be closer than they appear.
Myths regarding grief about dealing with death on a continual basis

- Familiarity with death makes it easier to accept loss
- As a professional you must set aside your personal emotions
- If you ignore grief it will eventually disappear
Coping Skills

- Perfectionist
- Ultra responsible
- People pleaser
- Strong helper
“Burnout, also know as compassion fatigue, occurs especially when we ignore our own needs because we believe the myth that serving others means we cannot equally serve ourselves.”

McLeod
The losses we grieve

When we think of losses we often think of losses associated with a death but the truth is there are many other losses that are significant and chronic. Many of these losses are disenfranchised.
The losses we grieve

- Loss of relationship/divorce
- Losses related to illness/accident that affect our normal functioning
- Losses of dreams related to children
- Financial losses
- Losses related to caring for elderly parents
- Pet loss
- Losses/changes in workplace setting
How is grief experienced in the professional setting

- Hidden
- Decreased productivity
- Increased absenteeism
- Burnout
- Increased conflicts with co-workers
- Decreased tolerance for stress
- Increased injuries/accidents
How is Grief Experienced?

- Physically
- Emotionally
- Cognitively
- Spiritually
- Behaviorally
Potential complications of chronic stress

- Sleep problems
- Digestive problems
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Heart Disease
- Ambivalence
- Obesity
- Worsening of skin conditions
- Memory impairment
Professional Loss

- Distant mourners
- Accumulate
- May take form of a chronic or delayed grief response
- Significant cause of burnout
- Often hidden and subtle
- May cause embarrassment or shame
What happens when your loved one is the hospice patient of your agency?

- Private life and work life intertwined
- Family looks to you as “professional”
- Feel safe, yet exposed
- Difficult to separate
- Staff forgets to treat you as a family member “I wanted to be a wife, not a nurse.”
- Work is full of grief triggers
- Increased access to staff in crisis
- “Difficult because I knew too much”
- “I had to now practice what I preached”
- “I could drive the care of my loved one. Care was easier than death and grief because that is not what I do as an RN”
Mindfulness

“Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, without judgment.”
- Acknowledge your grief
- Express your grief
- Return to the workplace before official return
- Seek/accept support of coworkers and friends *Mary's story*
- Communicate needs to supervisor
- Consultation
- Recognize what you can and can't do
- Find a balance
- Don’t push your needs aside
- Temporary changes in duties/cases
- Flex time
- Give yourself permission to shift gears
Supporting staff and co-workers

Management/HR

- Sharing information with other staff
- Meet with employee before return
- Care basket
- Make note of important dates
- Have support resource information available
- Nonjudgmental attitude
- Be prepared for emotions
- Acknowledge professional losses
Supporting a co-worker

- Are you in a place to emotionally support?
- Caring gestures
- Ask how you can support them
- Allow for their unique experience
Why I do what I do...

“There is a richness and feelings of gratification comparable to no other.”

“I do what I love. It is my passion and rarely feels like work.”

“It is such an honor to be present at such a vulnerable and sacred time.”

“Being so present in death allows me to understand so much about life.”


Clark, Elizabeth. Greif and Loss Tip Sheet- Understanding Professional Grief


Parkes, CM. “Orienteering the caregivers grief.” Journal of Palliative Care, 1986; 1:5-7


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