



A DEATH IN THE DEPARTMENT

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QUESTIONS

- ▶ How many of you have experienced a death in your department of a
 - Faculty member
 - Resident
 - Staff member
 - Administrator
- ▶ How many of you had to deliver the news about the death of someone in your department?



DELIVERING THE NEWS

- ▶ Provide compassionate, empathic, and timely delivery of the news to
 - People in the department
 - Others who have had contact with the person
 - Family members
- ▶ Be attuned to own reactions and need for support



QUESTIONS

- ▶ What did your department do to debrief about the death?
- ▶ What challenges did you and your department face?
- ▶ What were the dominant emotions experienced and expressed?



COMMUNICATION

- ▶ Have an open channel of communication within the department, and be sure communications are done sensitively, accurately, clearly, and in a timely fashion
- ▶ Be mindful of rumors and gossip and develop a strategy for addressing this natural process
- ▶ Reach out to the dying person in very personal ways
- ▶ Reach out to the family and have open lines of communication with the family

DEBRIEF

- ▶ Gather everyone together as quickly as possible
- ▶ Take time to talk about the loss – often with the assistance of a trained professional
- ▶ Ask for help from people in the department who might have relevant experience



DEBRIEF

- ▶ Share information to the extent possible and answer any questions that you can or find the answers
- ▶ Have others share information as well
- ▶ Be mindful of legal considerations in sharing information (what needs to be confidential and how can you be flexible about that)



DEBRIEF

- ▶ Review common signs of grief and typical emotional reactions to grief (sadness, guilt, shame, anger, confusion, numbness, scared)
- ▶ Discuss the grief cycle



DEBRIEF

- ◆ Convey the following messages
 - There is no right or wrong way to grief
 - Everyone grieves differently
 - Grief may involve extreme emotions and behaviors
 - There is no set or normal timetable for grieving



DEBRIEF

- ▶ Listen with compassion and empathy
 - Accept and acknowledge all feelings
 - Be willing to sit in silence and give people space
 - Let people talk about the death
 - Offer comfort and reassurance without minimizing the loss
- ▶ Engage in hand-holding



DEBRIEF

- ▶ Discuss effective coping strategies
- ▶ Offer solid practical assistance
- ▶ Provide ongoing support
- ▶ Encourage self-care



DEBRIEF

- ◆ Engage in rituals that are already prepared for by the family
 - Wake
 - Shiva
 - Funeral



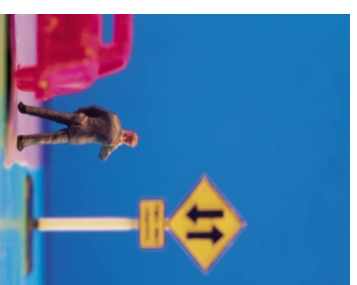
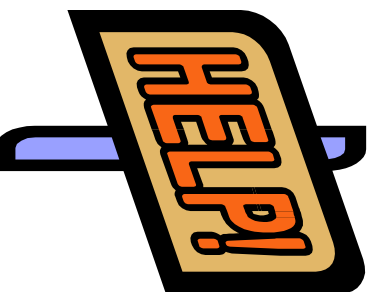
DEBRIEF

- ▶ Plan for rituals and ceremonies
 - Memorial service (with family and for just the department)
 - Award or event or memorial in person's honor
 - Contributions to support surviving family members



DEBRIEF

- ▶ Have additional counseling or other support services and resources available for those people interested or who evidence warning signs of problematic functioning following the death



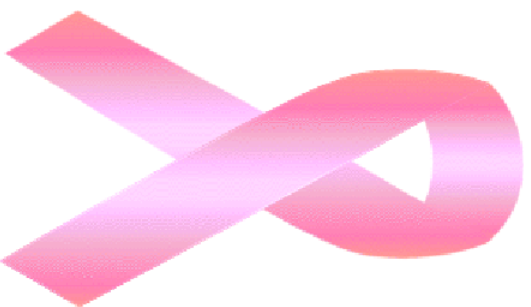
QUESTION

- ▶ What factors about the death influenced your department's reactions and handling of the death?
- ▶ What variables about the deceased person influenced the department's reactions and handling of the death?



CONSIDERATIONS

- ▶ Nature of the death
 - Sudden and unexpected versus expected and predictable
 - Natural causes versus self- or other-inflicted
- ▶ Where death occurred and who else was present



CONSIDERATIONS

- ▶ Person's role in the department
- ▶ Person's personal attributes
- ▶ People's relationship with the deceased
 - Duration
 - Quality
- ▶ Cultural factors



KEY OFFICES

- ▶ Identify relevant offices and groups
 - Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences
 - Faculty Staff Assistant Programs (EAP)
 - Counseling Center
 - Student Health
 - Religious Life
 - Security
- ▶ Form connections with key members of these offices before there is a tragedy so there is some sense of trust and comfort that already exists

QUESTIONS

