



Best Practice... *in Palliative Care*

GRIEF OR DEPRESSION?

Grief is a normal response to loss of any kind. People coping with serious or terminal illness may experience grief related to their prognosis. As a healthcare professional working with patients at this time, it is important to determine whether a patient is expressing symptoms of grief or depression. Grief symptoms may be confused with either pain or depression. Pain and depression are treatable and are not normal aspects of the dying process. Assessing for pain and depression and treating appropriately will help to facilitate a patient's normal grief process.

Symptoms for grief and depression appear similar yet there are key differentiating characteristics. Feelings of hopelessness, guilt, worthlessness and thoughts of suicide are the key factors that differentiate grief from depression.

Patients experiencing **grief**:

- respond to support from others
- openly express anger about their situation

- express sadness yet still experience times of enjoyment
- feel guilt over a specific aspect of the loss

Patients experiencing **depression**:

- do not accept support from others
- tend not to openly express anger
- exhibit general sense of doom and hopelessness
- have generalized feelings of guilt and extended loss of self-esteem

Healthcare professionals can help a patient experience normal grieving during serious illness by:

- Being very honest with the patient when discussing prognosis, patient goals and treatment options.
- Assessing for and treating pain and depression.
- Asking for help from other professionals experienced in working with grief and depression.

For more information, visit our website at www.unityhospice.org

Did you know?

There are several websites that address clinical and program issues related to hospice and palliative care.

In fact, most of the information shared in Best Practices is taken from Fast Facts, a publication found on the EPERC website.

www.eperc.mcw.edu

www.nhpco.org

www.capc.org

Best Practice is a publication for physicians, printed quarterly by Unity. To share your comments, please call Rance Hafner, MD at 920.338.1111.



LEADERS IN HOSPICE AND PALLIATIVE CARE

A Caring Not-for-Profit Partnership of Bellin Health, St. Mary's and St. Vincent Hospitals

2366 Oak Ridge Circle • De Pere, WI 54115

NONPROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
GREEN BAY, WI
PERMIT 141