

# Transcript

00:00:09 Michele Rasmussen

Welcome listeners to the NYU Langone Nursing Station podcast. This series will highlight nurses coming together to share information about daily professional practice and initiatives.

00:00:20 Michele Rasmussen

To improve vision outcomes.

00:00:22 Michele Rasmussen

In today's episode, we will be discussing grief and bereavement. This session is eligible for contact hours and in disclosure in compliance with ANC's Commission on accreditation. This educational activity does not include any content that relates to the products and or services of a commercial interest that would create a conflict.

00:00:43 Michele Rasmussen

Of interest, my name is Michelle Rasmussen, nursing quality specialist at Tish Kimmel here at NYU Langone.

00:00:50 Lauren Moran

And my name is Lauren Moran, a nursing professional development specialist on the Long Island campus.

00:00:56 Michele Rasmussen

In today's episode, we will hear from our clinical nurses as well as our experts in grief and bereavement.

00:01:02 Michele Rasmussen

So why don't we start off?

00:01:03 Michele Rasmussen

With some introductions, please include your name, title and campus.

00:01:08 Stefanie Butler

Good morning. My name is Stephanie Butler. I am a acute medicine nurse on Tish 16. WI have been there for 15 years. I am also board certified in gerontology and I am a certified Hospice and palliative.

00:01:27 Hope Velez

Hi, my name is hope and I am an oncology nurse on Hogue. One on the Long Island campus. I'm a senior nurse clinician. I've been an oncology nurse for 10 years. I'm board certified and met Surge currently studying for geriatrics.

00:01:47 Hope Velez

And I'm in grad school.

00:01:50 Heather Menzer

Hey, I'm Heather, mentor. I currently am the program manager for the Advanced Care Planning Program which is system wide. I've been at NYU for 15 years and I'm a palliative social worker by background. And I have a masters and a doctor at and a palliative certificate for social work for mental health.

00:02:10 Michele Rasmussen

1.

00:02:10 Michele Rasmussen

Before we're so excited to have all of you here today. So let's just start off with when we first introduced this topic to our podcast team to talk about grief and Berea.

00:02:21 Michele Rasmussen

It came to our awareness that says there is actually a national Grief Awareness Day on August 30th, which to our listeners out there, they may not even know that this day exists. Grief is something that I'm sure all of us have actually been impacted by, but this day actually recognizes the time it takes to heal from the loss of a loved one.

00:02:43 Michele Rasmussen

And we know that grief is unavoidable at some times during.

00:02:46 Michele Rasmussen

My life and it really is a normal reaction to loss and as healthcare providers caring for the seriously ill A dying patient can be particularly challenging and increase the risk of burnout.

So understanding the importance of grief and bereavement can help to increase awareness and sensitivity to the needs of the bereaved.

00:03:07 Michele Rasmussen

And help us to provide the appropriate support and guidance to those that are bereaved. Why don't we start off with you, Heather, what is really that impact that grief and bereavement may have on caregivers such as nurses and other healthcare providers?

00:03:22 Heather Menzer

Yeah. Thanks, Michelle. You're so right. There's such an impact that grief and loss can have on staff for so many reasons. First of all, so many of us are having repeated exposure to death and dying at work. And so that can certainly impact us. But also we have our regular lives. Things are going on. We're experiencing.

00:03:42 Heather Menzer

Grief for experiencing loss in different ways. We lived through the pandemic where there was so much loss and there were world events going on where we may be feeling bereaved, that we may be feeling grief with and so that can all have a really big impact about how we show up for our patients. And then just in general.

00:03:58 Heather Menzer

They can have an emotional impact. You talked about burnout. We might also feel things like compassion fatigue, where it's harder and harder to feel empathy towards our patients. We might feel moral distress where we have a hard time with the care that we're providing might feel morally or ethically wrong. All of those things can have a big.

00:04:18 Heather Menzer

Emotional impact.

00:04:20 Heather Menzer

If we don't process and deal with them and take time to really think about them, it can lead to things like feeling emotionally numb. It could lead even to depression anxiety. It could affect our sleep, which I wonder if some of our nurses out there have experienced it can have a physical impact and a lot of literature.

00:04:40 Heather Menzer

Those that they can really even affect their immune system fatigue or physical Wellness.

00:04:46 Heather Menzer

And then, of course, we talk about the impact it has on us. As professionals, it can impact our quality of care that we're providing our job satisfaction, the way we make decisions that work, that the connections that we have with those around us. I could go on and on, but really there are so many ways it impacts us.

00:05:06 Heather Menzer

The good news is there are things that we can do about it.

00:05:09 Heather Menzer

And by having different kinds of Wellness support at work, by having peer support, by counseling therapy, all of that, we can really do things to minimize the risk of grief that it has on our lives. We're going to experience it. But how much we let it affect.

00:05:29 Heather Menzer

Our work and our personal relationships that really is fluid and can change.

00:05:33 Heather Menzer

With the right support.

00:05:35 Michele Rasmussen

Thank you, Heather. That is such important information and really recognizing the impact that grief can have on us as healthcare workers, as nurses and how we are responding to grief can also impact how we care for our patients. So really important information there. You know, Stephanie, I know there's a lot of work that has been done.

00:05:55 Michele Rasmussen

On the unit that you work on, maybe you can share a little bit of how we're honoring our loved ones. At the end of life on the unit that you work.

00:06:04 Stefanie Butler

On sure. I'd really like to share that with you. So there are several of us on the unit where Hospice care is very near and dear to our heart. We've been nurses for a long time. We've seen death on our unit. We've also experienced in our own lives and it it's very important to us.

00:06:25 Stefanie Butler

To be able to not only be there for our patients at this time, but for their families. So our bereavement committee has developed what's called legacy projects for both our patients and our families. At the end of life.

00:06:42 Stefanie Butler

And we have a few different projects that we can do with the family members and the families to help create memories and to also give them the opportunity at this time to be with each other, start conversations, share memories.

00:07:02 Stefanie Butler

And to focus on being together.

00:07:05 Stefanie Butler

And having an experience together that isn't revolving around their loved one, maybe not being there with them for so long. Some of the things that we've done are finger painting with the patients and their families.

00:07:20 Stefanie Butler

Where we just, you know, either make hearts with one thumb of maybe the patient and the family member, or they can make flowers. And that's a piece of art that the family can bring home with them.

00:07:31 Stefanie Butler

We also print out EKG strips. There's been a.

00:07:34 Stefanie Butler

Lot of.

00:07:35 Stefanie Butler

Things written about how people sometimes take the heartbeat of their loved one and maybe get a tattoo or things like that. So we print it out and give them a keepsake that says something to the effect of their heart is always with you.

00:07:51 Stefanie Butler

There's also rock painting. There was actually a very wonderful story of one of our senior nurses doing this with one of our patients children.

00:08:01 Stefanie Butler

And they painted rocks with them and it just gave them the opportunity for the father and the daughter to all come together and have a really nice afternoon with each other. That was fun. It wasn't just about the reason why they were.

00:08:16 Stefanie Butler

In the hospital.

00:08:17 Stefanie Butler

So I think that it's been a really meaningful experience.

00:08:22 Stefanie Butler

For our patients and also for our nurses, some of us who have been doing this for a while are at the point where we consider it our greatest privilege to be with our patients and their families at this time. But it's not as easy for everyone.

00:08:35 Stefanie Butler

And this, I think, helps some nurses with the sadness and moral like distress that you can get when you're providing palliative care. It's it's not really the trajectory that we think we're going on with our patients. So when we're providing this care, I think.

00:08:55 Stefanie Butler

That is very helpful to especially newer nurses in this situation or younger nurses speaking to what Heather was saying about how difficult this can be and maybe alleviating some of that and providing care.

00:09:09 Stefanie Butler

There, we've also come up with a script for our nurses. It's not.

00:09:14 Stefanie Butler

Easy.

00:09:15 Stefanie Butler

To discuss. So it's also helpful to have pointers or just like a tip sheet, to allow them to know. Is this a good time to go? Maybe for the nurse for the day and you're not comfortable with it? It could be another nurse who's had this patient several times. There's no right or wrong answer to this. It's just.

00:09:34 Stefanie Butler

Giving our patients, their families and our nurses the chance and the ability to provide loving care at a very hard time in all of their experiences.

00:09:48 Stefanie Butler

I think it's been going very well and the other really interesting thing about it is that our providers don't stay with us. I don't know how it is on other hospitals, but sometimes our.

00:10:00 Stefanie Butler

Providers are our.

00:10:01 Stefanie Butler

Floors, sometimes our providers are on a different floor and there's been opportunities where our providers have been on other floors with.

00:10:09 Stefanie Butler

Hospice patients and they've come to us and said, can you go help the nurse on blank floor? So that's been informal.

00:10:20 Michele Rasmussen

That is really great work that is being done and it's so inspiring to hear the impact that it really has on not only the patients but on the nurses. It's really impactful and it's so meaningful just from personal experience, you know I've been a nurse here for 27 years and I've been impacted by patients.

00:10:40 Michele Rasmussen

That myself and it's really exciting to hear that people come from another unit to have you as now the experts, to share what you're doing on other units so that we can expand this throughout our organization and other units, so very.

00:10:56 Michele Rasmussen

Jayden.

00:10:57 Lauren Moran

Yeah. And I just have to say, Stephanie and Heather, it's so beautiful. The work that you're doing where you're making these kind of connections, you know it really difficult times in.

00:11:09 Lauren Moran

These.

00:11:10 Lauren Moran

Patients lives these family lives and the nurses lives. I worked in the neuro Wisu for 10 years as a staff nurse.

00:11:18 Lauren Moran

Before I went into nursing professional development and I mean, I can just remember being especially a new nurse and struggling in those moments where.

00:11:27 Lauren Moran

There, families were experiencing such loss and you didn't always know what to say and and you wanted to provide that comfort and you yourself as a nurse was hurting. I remember hurting and.

00:11:38 Lauren Moran

I.

00:11:38 Lauren Moran

Can still remember? I mean, I've been a nurse like Michelle a while. I've been a nurse 18 years and I remember patients that I lost. They stay with you forever.

00:11:48 Lauren Moran

So the work that Stephanie and and Heather you've mentioned, it's just so beautiful. I feel like we've come a long way in nursing, addressing grief and bereavement. And so I'm gonna.

00:12:00 Heather Menzer

Yeah.

00:12:00 Lauren Moran

Ask you some questions. I know you said you've been an oncology nurse for 10 years. Can you first just tell us about your experience working in the oncology setting?

00:12:11 Hope Velez

Sure. So I have to tell you my experience I always say, I took the scenic route to nursing. It's a third career for me that started on Wall Street and segued into the music industry. And here we are.

00:12:25 Hope Velez

My experience on an oncology unit is multifaceted. As I mentioned, it's a third career. So when you think about nursing, you think about healing you think about.

00:12:38 Hope Velez

Seeing an individual come in for a snapshot of their life or an ailment, and then you're here to help them along the process of getting better and closing that relationship, and quite the opposite is to when you're dealing with individuals who are on an oncology unit.

00:12:59 Hope Velez

And are getting treatment and are going through chemotherapy and are going through pain and ultimately realizing that what you thought you'd be contributing to in terms of healing is not.

00:13:15 Hope Velez

Now shifted into sharing experiences with families and patients that you have gotten to know over the course of a long time, and that shift is end of life care. And it's a very difficult situation to find yourself, and especially if you're a new nurse.

00:13:36 Hope Velez

I always say, you know, people want to celebrate the beginning of life and there's everyone's there. When the babies are born and everyone's happy, it's very difficult to find those who find comfort being there to help with the end of life, which in my.

00:13:53 Hope Velez

Indian is also a celebration of sorts, and that's how I try to spin it in order to provide my patients and my family members everything that it can possibly provide. It's important to review life stories and be a significant part.

00:14:13 Hope Velez

Of their journey, and we're only with them for a very short time and we have very little time to make an impact as a provider. Connecting with them is my life calling, it's.

00:14:27 Hope Velez

Also, an opportunity unfortunately, to realize what nurses do when you're on the.

00:14:32 Hope Velez

And Michelle mentioned this and having a family member on the unit. It gives you an opportunity.

00:14:41 Hope Velez

To feel both ends of the spectrum and Heather mentioned the compassion fatigue and it happens and it's a real thing. Our nurses always come in with the hope that we are able to get them.

00:14:56 Hope Velez

Better, and sometimes you lose focus of why you're here and the impact that you're making and you wonder, you know, what's the use? It's gonna end up bad. And so you kind of want to be there for one another and lift one another up. I am part of the Wellness Committee as well. So we have a lot of.

00:15:16 Hope Velez

Things that we do and try to implement for the nurses to make sure that they're also being taken care of in terms of the grief that they also feel aside from the family members, our patients are here quite some time you establish.

00:15:33 Hope Velez

A very true relationship with them and for a lot of our nurses, it's as if they're losing one of their own as well. And unfortunately, we don't have that time to sit and grieve the loss we have to take care of that patient and unfortunately we have to move on and go on with our day.

00:15:54 Hope Velez

And we don't have time to sit back and just.

00:15:57 Hope Velez

Feel the feels, you know it ends up hitting us at home or it ends up affecting our sleep as how they're meant to. And so it's a real serious thing and I am really excited that we are doing a lot more for both the families and for.

00:16:17 Hope Velez

Our fellow nurses.

00:16:20 Lauren Moran

Hope I'm first. I'm so sorry for your loss. Thank you for sharing that with us. It's so beautiful what you said about being a nurse and.

00:16:30 Lauren Moran

Coming in at that time in these people's lives that is so challenging and disorienting, all of the difficult things, and that you're finding ways.

00:16:44 Lauren Moran

To work through it. And I love that you said you're on the Wellness committee. That's something that is really coming onto the radar for nurses is our own Wellness. We've talked about resilience for a long time, but we haven't. We've talked about Wellness. So I love when I hear that nurses are really taking part in that.

00:17:05 Lauren Moran

Would you be able to tell us about the forever Heart Research initiative that took place on hope one, your oncology unit? What is this initiative about and how does it help family members or caregivers in the face of grief and bereavement?

00:17:22 Hope Velez

Sure, I'd love to share this. This is a very close to my heart and I was pretty honored to be invited to participate in this research study. So this pilot aimed to determine whether implementing what we call the Forever Heart program and refer to it as.

00:17:42 Hope Velez

F HP impacts the perceived patient dying experience.

00:17:47 Hope Velez

And the compassion of nurses working on an oncology unit with end of life patients. The interesting finding of our study determined that while our nurses already had a high level of compassion, there was very little room to show greater.

00:18:07 Hope Velez

Impact, but our qualitative results showed that it had a profound meaning to the nurses, the family members and the patients that were focus groups, which allowed nurses to share their stories and the impact that the Forever Heart program had on.

00:18:26 Hope Velez

It provides comfort to both the nurses and family members, and I'll tell you a little bit about what it is. We have a box of gems and different colors, and they're all in the shape of a heart. And when we find.

00:18:46 Hope Velez

That a patient is near end of life and it's a pretty.

00:18:50 Hope Velez

It's on a case by case study, but the nurse will determine whether they think it's a good fit and will have a private discussion with the patient in the hopes that the patient is alert and oriented enough and is open to receiving this information. It's a very, very delicate.

00:19:10 Hope Velez

Dance that we dance with our patients in terms of introducing the program because some people are still holding on to the hope that they're gonna pull through. So we ask participants if they want to engage in this and what we do is we allow.

00:19:29 Hope Velez

The individual an opportunity to choose parts. These gemstones for individuals and their family, and and the intention behind it is that they are able to share their energies. Holding on to this heart and placing their intentions for their loved ones.

00:19:49 Hope Velez

In this heart, and it gives a family member something tangible to hold on to, similar to the fingerprints and the EKG strips, we do not touch it after the patient has held onto it, we gently transfer it into a pal.

00:20:06 Hope Velez

And we present it to the family members and I have to tell you I'm holding mine.

00:20:13 Hope Velez

That was given to me for my mom because we didn't find in the results that were there was a big change in the level, an increase in the level of compassion we did find though, that there was a common theme and that the families.

00:20:33 Hope Velez

Will always remember the nurse. The feedback we have gotten has been extremely positive.

00:20:42 Hope Velez

And quite humbling for the nurses who participate in it. Some nurses have a tough time presenting and I'm the forever heart champion on here, so I'll jump right in and help them

along. And then some people are very uncomfortable with it, which is OK. It's our opportunity to say.

00:21:02 Hope Velez

Yay or nay, and we always hope that we can leave the family members with something that they can hold on to during the grieving process.

00:21:13 Hope Velez

And also it does help the nurses to kind of loop around and kind of close that relationship as I said earlier, we have the patients for a small time of their lives, we get them better and then we send them home here we lose them. So it provides an opportunity for the nurses.

00:21:32 Hope Velez

To kind of close that relationship and move on because of the study, we saw an opportunity to disseminate this study and process with other floors.

00:21:43 Hope Velez

And our ultimate goal is to have it available system wide, which we're really excited about. The research study will be published in December on the online journal for Hospice and palliative care nursing. So we're really excited about that.

00:22:00 Lauren Moran

That's incredible. Hope. The research study that's done on your unit and just hearing from both you and Stephanie, this idea of giving these family members a keepsake, you know, in whatever form that is coming in, this the beautiful heart gemstone that you HG strip.

00:22:21

Just.

00:22:22 Lauren Moran

Beautifully hear these connections that we're giving patients family members to hold on to and I like hope that you mentioned that it's can be challenging for the nurse, you know, some nurses are. You're more of a champion, but it can be difficult and that's OK.

00:22:39 Hope Velez

Yeah, we always try to ensure that the nurses are in a place where they're comfortable with doing this or not, but also knowing that there are others that they can turn to that can help them during their presentation of this. And we always try and help them to understand and.

00:22:59 Hope Velez

That.

00:23:00 Hope Velez

Ultimately, we're taking care of them at the same time that we are taking care of each other more often than not, nurses forget that we need to take care of ourselves and one another's days are challenging. The hours are long, and the sadness and the grief is real. And it's heavy on our floor, very heavy.

00:23:21 Lauren Moran

I want to thank all of you for sharing all of us today. This is a very heavy, sensitive subject and so for Stephanie, Heather hope for you to come on as the experts and share with our nurses that listen to this podcast. It's really meaningful.

00:23:41 Michele Rasmussen

Does anybody have any other final thoughts or comments that they would like to share?

00:23:47 Heather Menzer

This is Heather. I might just add that these are such beautiful stories that you both share about how you're working so closely with families. And there is a lot of literature.

00:23:58 Heather Menzer

Talks about both how important legacy items can be for families in their own coping. So you both really picked up on that importance and also.

00:24:08 Heather Menzer

There's a lot.

00:24:08 Heather Menzer

Of literature that speaks to the fact that families want help from us as healthcare providers when we're going through this, and that's an additional important step. So coming in and saying we're going to give you some options, you can choose to do it or not, but we've got you, we we know how to handle this situation and we have these things that you can take.

00:24:29 Heather Menzer

Home just offering that even if somebody doesn't take you up on it, it's really, really powerful. And then you're going that extra step where you're supporting your colleagues

and becoming competent in this skill, which is really hard. All of that is so important. And then we got to take it one step more, which is our own.

00:24:48 Heather Menzer

Self-care which is.

00:24:50 Heather Menzer

Doing that hard work can feel really good.

00:24:52 Heather Menzer

But it also can.

00:24:52 Heather Menzer

Take a lot.

00:24:53 Heather Menzer

Out of us. So thinking about that peer support private therapy if that's something you need, creating a Wellness group.

00:25:01 Heather Menzer

On your unit creating some kind of peripheral. Hope you were talking about how hard it is to move on when a patient has died and then you have to get up and take care of another patient. Maybe there's a personal or a unit ritual that you can do to honor that moment. There's all these things that we can do. You guys are doing.

00:25:17 Heather Menzer

Such incredible work.

00:25:19 Heather Menzer

You're providing things to the family that are.

00:25:21 Heather Menzer

Invaluable that they will take with them forever that will be meaningful and we.

00:25:25 Heather Menzer

Want you to take care of yourselves too, because you really.

00:25:27 Heather Menzer

Deserve that. Thank you.

00:25:29 Stefanie Butler

Heather. Heather.

00:25:30 Hope Velez

Thank you, Heather. That's really kind.

00:25:33 Stefanie Butler

And I would just like to say as well, Heather, you and I have worked with each other for many years doing this this is.

00:25:42 Stefanie Butler

A team effort. It is interdisciplinary. We know that we can call on you. We know there's other services throughout the hospital. It's important for the nurses to know that we're not alone in these endeavors.

00:25:59 Stefanie Butler

There's resources out there for us as well. There's social work and palliative care and integrative health. There's there's outlets for us to be able to get ideas and try to figure out how best to help these patients. Because as you said, this isn't a Direct Line, it's fuzzy and it's.

00:26:19 Stefanie Butler

Squiggly and it's really. However, we can try to get there is what we're trying to do. So thank you as well for always being there for helping.

00:26:27 Stefanie Butler

Us.

00:26:29 Lauren Moran

Thank you so much to all three of our speakers, Stephanie, Heather and hope for joining us today, sharing your expertise, recognizing the importance of understanding grief and bereavement and the impact that it has on our patients, our families, all of our interdisciplinary team.

00:26:50 Lauren Moran

We hope that our listeners found this discussion helpful and can take some of the strategies heard here today to support their own patients and families and colleagues.

00:27:00 Lauren Moran

For any questions or comments, you can e-mail us at hashtag nursing Station podcast and also as a reminder, this session is eligible for 0.5 contact hours. The survey will be posted with the recording. Please access and complete the evaluation to attain the certificate.

00:27:20 Lauren Moran

And thank you again to our speakers.