TRAUMATIC GRIEF: LOOKING THROUGH A WIDER LENS

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“When people are overwhelmed by illness, we must give them physical relief, but it is equally important to encourage the spirit through a constant show of love and compassion. It is shameful how often we fail to see that what people desperately require is human affection. Deprived of warmth and a sense of value, other forms of treatment prove less effective. Real care of the sick does not begin with costly procedures, but with the simple gifts of affection, love and concern. The Dalai Lama
• Sudden or Unexpected Death
• Acute Health Event
• Accidental Death
• Overdose, Suicide
• Homicide
• COVID-19
DYING IN THE TIME OF COVID-19
GRIEF

- Grief is a normal and natural, though often deeply painful response to loss. The death of a family member is the most common way we think of loss, but many other significant changes in one's life can involve loss and therefore grief.
- Human beings are “hard-wired” to be able to grieve.
GRIEF IN THE UNITED STATES - WHAT PEOPLE EXPECT
BUT THE US IS MULTI-ETHNIC AND DIVERSE.....

AND A VARIETY OF DEATH AND MEMORIAL PRACTICES ARE PRESENT
GRIEF OBSERVANCE PRACTICES WERE RAPIDLY CHANGING BEFORE COVID-19

Funeral ➔ Memorial ➔ Life Celebration
IN THE US-
VIOLENT, UNEXPECTED DEATH FRAMES PUBLIC GRIEF
PUBLIC, SPONTANEOUS GRIEF
.....INDIVIDUAL EXPRESSIONS
PUBLIC GRIEF
....RESPONSE TO COLLECTIVE LOSS
PUBLIC GRIEF
...COLLECTIVE EXPRESSION, RESPONSE TO TRAUMA
GRIEF IN THE TIME OF COVID-19
COVID-19 GRIEF....UNWITNESSED
COVID-19 GRIEF..... IN THE PUBLIC EYE

That's roughly a million more deaths than would have been expected in that time.

These so-called excess deaths were overwhelmingly attributed directly to Covid-19.
COVID-19 deaths exemplify “bad” deaths
“Bad deaths” violate cultural expectations for a peaceful death and involve suffering.
Distress is compounded by social isolation, co-occurring stressors, and loss of face-to-face mourning rituals.
Virtual memorial services, distance support groups, and other innovations may provide short-term support for survivors of deaths during the pandemic….yet..
Trauma remains …..
COVID-19 GRIEF

Ambiguous loss

- A loss that remains unclear and thus has no closure... has no *(socially recognized)* official verification; can’t be clarified, cured, or fixed.
- The challenge lies in the external context of ambiguity, not in the individual or family.

Disenfranchised grief

- The death is not socially endorsed and the grief is *(perceived as or may be)* not supported.
IMPACT ON HEALTH CARE WORKERS

trauma, moral distress, infection/death, death of colleagues, risk to family, leave profession
IMPACT ON TEACHERS, STUDENTS, FAMILIES

Fearing back-to-school COVID-19 exposure, some teachers opt for safety, sparking worries of staffing shortages
Attacks on Public Health Officials During COVID-19

Michelle M. Mello, JD, PhD1; Jeremy A. Greene, MD, PhD2,3; Joshua M. Shafstein, MD2

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COVID-19 Resource Center

Wisconsin Pharmacist who Tried to Destroy Vaccines to Plead Guilty

Jan 26, 2021
By Bryan Pelsch
GRIEF NOW...AND IN THE DAYS AHEAD

Health Footprint of Pandemic

1st Wave
- Immediate mortality and morbidity of COVID-19

2nd Wave
- Impact of resource restriction on urgent non-COVID conditions

3rd Wave
- Impact of interrupted care on chronic conditions

4th Wave
- Psychic trauma
- Mental illness
- Economic injury
- Burnout

Time
WHAT WE AND THE PEOPLE WE CARE FOR ARE EXPERIENCING....

- Anxiety and fear about the virus
- Financial uncertainty
- Grief—the loss of what you were planning
- Physical fatigue and poor sleep
- Recognition that you were already exhausted before this
- Compassion fatigue/trauma/vicarious trauma
- Demoralization vs. Depression
COMPASSION FATIGUE:

When the demands of the situation exceed the capacity of the individual
WHAT ARE THE LESSONS OF CARING FOR OTHERS?

• The world is a dangerous (unpredictable) place.
• The world is a wonderful place.
• Life is short.
• Energy is finite.
• Priorities matter.

• How we support clients, families and the public matters—
• What we offer is of value and places us at risk for compassion fatigue—
• What we do also protects us from compassion fatigue.
• How do we “walk the walk?”
“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.”

Rachel Naomi Remen
Balance & Acceptance vs Resilience in “Unknowable” Times

Burnout Isn’t Just in Your Head. It’s in Your Circumstances.
We can fight emotional exhaustion by decreasing demands, increasing support and enhancing control.

Zoom Exhaustion is Real. Here Are Six Ways to Find Balance and Stay Connected

On Coronavirus Lockdown? Look for Meaning, Not Happiness

Your ‘Surge Capacity’ Is Depleted — It’s Why You Feel Awful

Illustration: Adam Farrow
Able to recover quickly from misfortune; able to return to original form after being bent, compressed, or stretched out of shape. A human ability to recover quickly from disruptive change, or misfortune without being overwhelmed or acting in dysfunctional or harmful ways.
WHAT HELPS?

• Physical: exercise, nutrition, sleep & rest
• Emotional: acceptance, pace & processing, talk it out
• Cognitive: variety—not just work
• Social: balance engagement with solitude
• Spiritual: prayer, ritual, meditation
• Balance structure & routine with variety
• Gratitude
• Measured exposure to media and social media
RESILIENCE IS NOT ENOUGH....SYSTEMS MUST CHANGE

THANK YOU
DOCTORS, NURSES & TEAM MEMBERS!

Reflect on how to become part of the transformation
If we want to address mental health, we need to dig deeper.
### Utah

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### United States

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AN ALTERNATIVE: “COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITIES MOVEMENT

…challenges the convention that the purview of death and dying should be only within clinical and institutional contexts and instead positions it as everyone’s responsibility. In so doing, this movement is working to shift the conversations about, and location of, death into community spaces.”

Breen, et al., 2020
A COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITY HAS...

• The capacity to access, process, and use knowledge regarding the experience of loss.
• The knowledge to facilitate understanding and reflection, skills to enable action, and values to inspire compassion and care.
• Support for the interdependence of individuals within socio-cultural contexts.
“THE MORE PEOPLE ARE ANCHORED IN COMMUNITIES WHERE THEY FEEL CONNECTED, PROTECTED, AND RESPECTED, THE MORE PEOPLE ARE READY TO REACH OUT AND EXPERIMENT. THE LESS THEY FEEL CONNECTED, PROTECTED AND RESPECTED, THE MORE THEY’LL WANT TO BUILD WALLS TO PROTECT THEMSELVES FROM CHANGE.”

THOMAS FRIEDMAN, “THANK YOU FOR BEING LATE: AN OPTIMIST’S GUIDE TO THRIVING IN THE AGE OF ACCELERATIONS.”
IN A HEALTHY COMMUNITY—COMMUNITY MEMBERS, THAT IS, THE CITIZENS OF THAT COMMUNITY ARE:

- **Connected**—they live lives within a safety net of care that supports healthy interrelationships, is characterized by trust and equips citizens to navigate the wider world.

- **Respected**—they are listened to, cared for, cared about, and encouraged to share their own gifts and talents with each other and with the larger world. They are honored for being who they are—just that is enough—not for what they do or have.

- **Protected**—the young, the old, the vulnerable, the suffering are shielded from harm, and/or are nurtured, and resourced when harm happens.
We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It's easy to say 'It's not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem.' Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes.

- Fred Rogers

And…

*a special shout out to Rebecca King, who lives this ethos*
• **COVID-19 Grief Support Group**

This group will be focused on COVID-19 related grief — This includes those who have lost a family member or friend to coronavirus as well as all who are grieving deaths that were disrupted. Disrupted grief experiences include family unable to be present in hospital or nursing home at time of death, no family funeral gatherings, family unable to travel to memorials, or memorial events being delayed. Losses in these unprecedented circumstances have potential to be experienced as trauma, and require compassionate, evidenced-based care.

• **COVID-19 Recovery Group**

This group will be focused on support for individuals who have had COVID-19 and are dealing with emotional struggles related to their illness and any lasting symptoms. As a relatively new experience, surviving COVID-19 has its own unique set of challenges that society as a whole is still learning about. People who are dealing with these difficulties can find support in this group from others with similar experiences.
QUESTIONS?

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