



The **Regulation** and
Quality Improvement
Authority

Coping with Grief

Advice for relatives involved in the Expert Review
of Records of Deceased Patients of Dr M Watt.

On behalf of RQIA, we wish to offer our sincere sympathy to you on the death of your loved one. We are aware that our contact with you may prove difficult and painful and may further impact on your grief and sorrow. We apologise for any potential distress this may cause.

Introduction

This guidance has been developed to support the next-of-kin or family members of the deceased patients during the course of our review. It aims to provide some reassurance on the thoughts, feelings and behaviours that accompany grief, and acknowledges how such reactions might be increased by your involvement in this review.

We have identified a number of organisations who can offer you additional emotional support, should that be of benefit. In addition, our Family Liaison Team can arrange independent counselling services should this be required. Contact details are included in this leaflet and on our website www.rqia.org.uk

Families might also find our *Family Information leaflet* useful at this time.

We appreciate that you may not wish to avail of this guidance or access additional support, or you may wish to have no further engagement with RQIA. We will respect your decisions in this regard.

How the death of a loved one may affect you

The death of a loved one is one of the most difficult emotional experiences that we can have in life. The pain and grief that follows can seem, at times, totally overwhelming and may last for a long time.

This can be harder to bear if a loved one's death is believed to have been avoidable, or that their experiences of dying were unnecessarily difficult.

Each person will cope in their own way and it is important to know that there is no 'correct' way to grieve. Members of the same family may respond to the same death in different ways.

Your feelings may also ebb and flow and involvement in our review may make you feel that you are going backwards, instead of recovering from your loss. Be assured you will continue to grow stronger and cope with your loss.

We are mindful that the potential reliving of past difficult times, through involvement in this review, may also cause a resurgence of those acute grief reactions and you may find yourself revisiting past events and memories.

Although extremely painful, grief is a normal response to any loss and is a way of helping us heal. While life may never be the same again, grief helps us readjust and cope with life without our loved one. It helps us find ways of maintaining our bond with our loved one when they are no longer with us.

Feelings and thoughts you might experience after the death of your loved one

People who have experienced the death of someone close often describe experiencing:

- Shock, numbness or disbelief, especially immediately afterwards when they find difficulty accepting or believing what has happened.
- Anguish and despair, which can be accompanied by real pain and physical heartache as the reality of the loss sinks in.
- Anger and irritability and the associated questioning of "Why did this have to happen?"
- Restlessness or agitation.
- Longing or yearning for the person who has died and thinking that you have seen or heard the person who has died.
- Loneliness, even when surrounded by others.
- Guilt for things said or not said, or for feeling that you could have done more to help your loved one.
- Worry or fear for what lies ahead.
- Deep sadness as you miss the one you love.

These feelings often continue long after our loved one has died and can be triggered by memories or experiences. Understandably, feelings of anger and guilt can be exacerbated if we have any concerns about the care our loved one received when they were ill.

Coping with the loss of a loved one

You may find that you can cope by yourself; however, you may need the support of others. This can come from your family and friends, from other sources such as your local community or faith/belief group or perhaps from a health/social care professional.

It is also important to make some time to care for yourself, eating regular meals and taking adequate rest. We appreciate that this review may take some time to complete and taking these steps will help you to feel more in control.

Some of the following suggestions may also help:

- Do not be worried if your feelings of grief intensify over the next number of weeks. This is sometimes known as 're-grief' as events may trigger and remind you of your loss and bring to the fore worries you have about your loved one's care. Allow yourself time to actively grieve. You may benefit from extra support at these times.
- If you feel like crying, don't prevent yourself from doing so. This is a normal way to release your feelings and is not a sign of weakness.
- Try to avoid depending upon substances such as alcohol, medications or drugs to help cope with your feelings.
- If the intensity of your feelings adversely affects your daily life do not hesitate to contact your GP.

People who have been bereaved often describe how their behaviour changes too. For example, people who are normally outgoing may start to avoid family and friends. The desire to talk constantly about the loved one may change over time to not being able to mention their name. Some people get comfort being somewhere that they associate with their loved one, while others will avoid such places as they are too painful.

You may want to talk a lot about this ongoing review and the memories it has raised, or you may feel overwhelmed and need time out and find others' questioning difficult and upsetting. Both responses are understandable at this difficult time.

Grief can also affect our physical health and being involved in the current review might interfere with your sleep and appetite. If this is the case and you are concerned about your physical health speak to your doctor or other health care professional who will be able to offer you further help and advice. Alternatively, you may contact one of the organisations below:

Useful contacts

RQIA's Family Liaison Team

Tel: 0800 052 0012

expert.review@rqia.org.uk

Lifeline - 24 hour support for those in distress or despair

Tel: 0808 808 8000

Samaritans

Tel: 116123

CRUSE Bereavement Care

Tel: 028 9043 4600 or 0808 808 1677

www.cruse.org.uk

Contact Us

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority
9th Floor, Riverside Tower
5 Lanyon Place
Belfast BT1 3BT

www.rqia.org.uk

Tel: (028) 9536 1111

Email: info@rqia.org.uk