



YOUR QUESTION

What supports are needed for frontline healthcare staff following the death of a colleague due to COVID-19?

What is the best evidence currently?

The HSE Employee Assistance Programme has produced guidance for healthcare workers affected by the death in service of a colleague due to COVID-19. For further details or assistance, please contact your local Employee Assistance Programme or email Ann.Callanan@hse.ie or Morgan.Lucey@hse.ie.

Our co-workers are very much an extended family. We spend most of our waking hours with them, forging special bonds of trust and friendship that are unlike our other relationships.

Numerous aspects of hospital work, including the death or suffering of a patient or colleague, can make health care workers vulnerable to cumulative grief and stress.

Peer support is helpful to bereaved survivors, reducing grief symptoms and increasing well-being and personal growth. There are also benefits to providers of peer support, including increased personal growth and positive meaning in life. Several studies address the growing trend of Internet-based peer support programs, finding that these are beneficial in part due to their easy accessibility.

Debriefing sessions can enhance grief management strategies, normalize grief responses, and aid in identifying need for further support. Prolonged unresolved events building up over time can lead to mental, spiritual or physical distress and burnout.

Trauma in the workplace can be precipitated by a number of tragedies, but death of an employee is the most common occurrence. Bereavement, mourning, and grief are common reactions. In most cases, people successfully cope with the death within two months, but some develop chronic grief, which is also referred to as complicated grief.



The death of a colleague sets the team upon a path that will transform individuals and alter the group's dynamics. In an instant, the workplace takes on a surreal feel as team members learn of their colleague's death and begin to accept the loss. The team will never be the same as they struggle together to discover a new norm.

Staff will be distracted to different extents and all will need to adjust to the distraction and refocus on the needs of the day, in their own way and own time. The time of readjusting and reflection will take weeks to months. This time of adjustment is particularly important if the staff are clinicians. If the clinician is too distracted, patient safety could be in jeopardy.

Some on the team will be more resilient than others. It is a good thing for the team to talk and discuss their feelings, but some on the team will use denial as a coping mechanism around their loss. As a leader, pay attention to your own needs while offering care to the team. Take time to reflect on your feelings and grief around the loss of your colleague. Utilize your own support system and support staff as needed.

Bereavement doesn't have a predictable pattern. Be understanding of the inner turmoil and stress your co-worker is experiencing as he or she moves through the grief process. The support work colleagues can provide, also called social capital, goes a long way toward building a workplace culture that's conducive to a healthy recovery. A workplace with social capital supports mental health. Such workplaces are rewarded in the longer term with job satisfaction, fewer absences and greater loyalty.



SOURCES*

APA Help Centre

<https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/coworker> [Accessed 30/03/2020]

Peer Support Services for Bereaved Survivors: A Systematic Review

Bartone, PT et al (2019) [Omega]

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28871835> [Accessed 30/03/2020]

Bereavement debriefings: Enhancing grief management strategies and staff wellness (Conference Abstract)

Zadeh, S et al (2017) [Psycho-Oncology] <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/pon.4353> [Accessed 30/03/2020]

Trauma in the workplace: grief counseling 101

Zanni, G R et al (2014) [Consultant Pharmacist] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24413016> [Accessed 30/02/2020]

Supporting coworkers after a personal loss

Chichester, M et al (2018) [Nursing 2019]

https://journals.lww.com/nursing/Fulltext/2018/03000/Supporting_coworkers_after_a_personal_loss.15.aspx [Accessed 30/03/2020]

Getting the team through the death of a colleague

Wilson, T (2011) [Gastroenterol Nurs] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21814067> [Accessed 30/03/2020]

A model for supporting grief recovery following traumatic loss: the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)

Dooley, C et al (2019) [Military Medicine] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/31132122> [Accessed 30/03/2020]

Grieving in exceptional times

Irish Hospice Foundation

<https://hospicefoundation.ie/bereavement-2-2/covid19-care-and-inform/grieving-in-exceptional-times/> [Accessed 30/03/2020]

Grief in the workplace

Irish Hospice Foundation <https://hospicefoundation.ie/bereavement-2-2/working-in-bereavement-and-loss/grief-in-the-workplace/> [Accessed 30/03/2020]

Grief at work: developing a bereavement policy

McGuinness, Breffni (2007) <https://issuu.com/laurarooneyf/docs/griefatwork> [Accessed 30/03/2020]



Produced by the members of the National Health Library and Knowledge Service Evidence Team.† Current as at 02 April 2020. This rapid evidence review collates the best available evidence at the time of writing. Emerging literature or subsequent developments in respect of COVID-19 may require amendment to the information or sources listed in the document. Although all reasonable care has been taken in the compilation of content, the National Health Library and Knowledge Service Evidence Team makes no representations or warranties expressed or implied as to the accuracy or suitability of the information or sources listed in the document. This evidence summary is the property of the National Health Library and Knowledge Service and subsequent re-use or distribution in whole or in part should include acknowledgement of the service.

The following PICO(T) was used as a basis for the evidence summary:

P Population person location condition/patient characteristic	HEALTH CARE WORKERS WHO LOSE A COLLEAGUE AS A RESULT OF COVID-19
I Intervention length location type	SUPPORT INTERVENTIONS
C Comparison another intervention no intervention location of the intervention	
O Outcome	MAINTENANCE OF STAFF HEALTH AND WELL BEING

The following search strategy was used:

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1 (colleague or coworker or co-worker or workplace or "work place")
2 exp coworker/
3 1 OR 2
4 (bereave* or grief or grieve or grieving or mourn*)
5 exp bereavement/
6 exp bereavement support/
7 4 OR 5 OR 6
8 3 AND 7
  
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