



RESOURCE GUIDE

Cumulative Grief

Continual witness to loss can profoundly affect individuals at an emotional, physical, and spiritual level.^{1,2} Over a lifetime, loss can be experienced in many different forms, such as death, loss of a job, unrealistic expectations or changes to job role. The inability to acknowledge and properly grieve such losses can lead to cumulative grief with negative short and long-term effects and on health and relationships with others.^{1,3} This video addresses how a healthier and more sustainable care culture can be created through awareness, knowledge, personal rituals, relentless self-care and building systems that authentically integrate grief management into workflow processes.⁴⁻⁷

MAIN POINTS

- Cumulative grief can be caused by the inability to express or resolve grief, inadequate resources, unrealistic work expectations and cultural expectations that healthcare workers should not be affected by loss.^{8,9,11}
- Signs and symptoms differ for each individual and may be physical, psychological, and spiritual in nature.^{1,5,10}
- When untreated, risks include substance abuse (and other unhealthy coping patterns), burnout, compassion fatigue, performance issues and decreased quality of patient care, increased absenteeism, and staff turnover.^{1,4,10}
- Immediate actions you can take include performing rituals with intention whenever and wherever you experience loss, such as taking a pause, having a mantra/prayer, breathwork, or “shedding” your professional role at day end.^{4,5,11}
- Individuals must first acknowledge their risk for cumulative grief and commit to action through early prevention, self-reflection, continual self-care, education, and storytelling.^{1,3,4,7}
- Team members can maintain accountability for team health by offering support and processing loss with memorial boards, attending funerals, bereavement cards, and sharing food and feelings.^{3,4,11}
- Organizations must normalize and validate cumulative loss by integrating content into staff orientation and annual education, mandating time for self-care, modeling self-care, and making resources visible and available.^{1,3,12}

RESOURCES

Compassionate Care Initiative through the University of Virginia: <https://cci.nursing.virginia.edu/>

Employee Assistance Program (EAP) through your organization

Headspace meditation application: <https://www.headspace.com>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255 or <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

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