

ADAPTING TO LIFE AFTER LOSS

Does counselling in a specialist palliative care unit make a difference?



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Introduction

"Only people who are capable of loving strongly can also suffer great sorrow, but this same necessity of loving serves to counteract their grief and heals them".

(Tolstoy 1828-1910)

Bereavement is a natural process and not an illness¹ and only those who request help and are already experiencing complications are likely to benefit from therapy.²

Palliative care aims to care for not only those living with and dying from a life threatening illness but also for those who grieve their death.^{3,4,5}

Recognising this need, St Columba's Hospice employed an experienced counsellor into the post of Bereavement Coordinator in 2008 with the remit to introduce and develop a counselling service for those experiencing complex grief. This service was evaluated one year later.

Aim

To assess the effectiveness of bereavement counselling in supporting clients to make the difficult journey through complex grief and to establish if the current resource meets the demands of the referrals.

Method

Questionnaires were sent to all clients (34) who had attended 4 or more bereavement counselling sessions between July 2009 and January 2011. Thirty (88%) questionnaires were returned.

Results

The range of number of sessions attended was 2-51 (median 8) with 29 relatives satisfied with the number of sessions received and one indicating a need for more. Thirty-eight per cent of those attending sessions were wives and the remaining immediate family members.

The results which follow demonstrate the service is undoubtedly meeting the needs of those receiving counselling (see Figures 1, 2 and 3), with many relatives offering very personal supporting statements.

Figure 1: How would you rate the quality of the bereavement counselling you received?



This is supported by the following client statement:

"The service has been invaluable; I could not have coped without it."

Figure 2: Did the counselling meet your needs?



This is supported by the following client statement:

"I feel certain I would not have been able to live through the dark days last year without the help I received."

Figure 3: Has counselling helped you to deal more effectively with your problems?



This is supported by the following client statement:

"Counselling helped me change my life not only with the loss of my Dad but also with my confidence and outlook on life."

Conclusion

This evaluation confirms the effectiveness of the bereavement counselling service at St Columba's Hospice in supporting clients experiencing complex grief. This evidence will influence the further development of the service ensuring that St Columba's Hospice continues to strive to meet the needs of those suffering complex grief.

References:

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