Grief Support in Nursing Homes

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Introduction

- Every year, approximately 500,000 older adults pass away while residing in nursing homes in the United States.
- These statistics have been compounded during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- As a result, growing numbers of older adults make end-of-life decisions and receive end of life services in nursing homes.
- However, there is a lack of research on the experiences of the nursing home staff who provide this care and no known studies have sought the experience of grief support from the perspective of administrators in training within nursing homes.

Hypothesis

- This study examines organizational practices in nursing homes specific to end-of-life care.
- We predict that in nursing homes, there is minimal grief support.

Methodology

- Administrative residency students (37) were interviewed three months into their residency experience about grief support at their facilities.
- Two faculty members and two research students reviewed the data for novel ideas that might be of interest for practitioners, providing suggestions for grief support in nursing homes.

Qualitative Perceptions

Question: Who is involved in the end-of-life processes/death at your facility?	Everyone deals with death End-of-life care includes every department All worker categories listed: e.g., administrators
	Some departments noted deal with death more often, due to their roles in providing direct care or due to their direct care roles: Nursing department/ physicians Aides Social Services
	Support to residents and staff: Chaplain or other religious leaders can talk to others and help deal with death
Question: What grief support is available at your facility?	Memorial services
	Staff support: Meetings Informal staff support (nurse hugs)
	Chaplain/hospice available for staff if desired
	Cards to the family
	Counseling services
	Bereavement days for staff Often short-term (e.g., 2 days)
	Training: Overall training limitations (e.g., not available/rated as poor) Orientation training, 20 min

Sample Quotes

Who is involved in the end-of-life process/death?	"Everyone who is involved with a resident 'deal' with a resident's death."
	"Death tends to be a whole-facility dealing at the majority of our facilities."
Grief Support and related training	"DON would comfort staff by talking or giving a hug."
	"It is a lot different when you're in the moment dealing with death vs. being trained on death."
	"Unfortunately, I am unaware of anything my site does when it comes to grieving and the loss of fellow residents."

Results

- There are a wide variety of nursing home workers who are involved in the end-of-life process.
- Administrative residency students shared the types of grief support available in their care facilities as well as relevant training available to nursing home workers to allow them to cope with their grief appropriately.
- Results suggest there is limited support when it comes to services related to mental health and training.
- Current grief support for nursing home staff is mostly informal (staff supporting staff).

Discussion

- These findings can help inform improvements to the overall grief support available for not only nursing home workers, but healthcare workers in general.
- Mortality in nursing homes, staff attitudes, and environmental factors associated with mortality are important for health authorities and decision makers to consider as they revise policies to enhance quality of care and quality of life.

Conclusion

- Findings of this research highlighted exemplary and unique practices that researchers believe could be adopted and implemented widely.