Using Second Life to Facilitate Peer Storytelling for Grieving Oncology Nurses

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Background

• Oncology nurses’ chronic exposure to death leads to illness, burnout, and attrition (Brown & Wood, 2009; Erickson & Grove, 2007)
• Potential benefit in using peer storytelling group to resolve nurses’ grief related to pediatric patient deaths (Macpherson, 2008)
• Some benefit in using internet-based support groups in resolving grief related to the death of significant others (Dominiak et al., 2009)
• Limited studies published addressing measurement of nurses’ grief related to patient death

Study Purpose

• Explore how oncology nurses express and process grief using a virtual venue for peer storytelling

Research Questions

1. How do oncology nurses express and process grief surrounding patients’ deaths through peer storytelling in SL?

2. Do oncology nurses report a benefit of using peer storytelling in SL in dealing with grief related to patients’ deaths?

Methods

• Design
  – Pilot study using mixed methods
  • Survey
  • Focus groups
• Setting
  – Private virtual island in Second Life
• Sample
  – Purposive sample recruited from 1 facility
  • Flyers & network sampling
  • 9 oncology RNs reporting patient-related grief
**Peer Storytelling Intervention**

- 3 nurse cohorts (n=9) met every other week for 10 weeks (5 sessions each)
- Focus group sessions based on Bereavement Task Model activities
  1. Understanding the emotional experience
  2. Restoring & maintaining integrity
  3. Managing affect
  4. Realigning relationships
  5. Identifying & building coping skills
- Fostering intervention fidelity
  - Participant readiness
    - Orientation session
    - Technical support at each session
  - Facilitated by same independent grief counselor

**Measurement & Instruments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable of Interest</th>
<th>Questionnaires</th>
<th>Questionnaires &amp; Focus Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographics (age, RN yrs, Onc yrs, Unit, Edu, Gender)</td>
<td>6 items</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional loss!</td>
<td>8 items</td>
<td>6 items Sessions 1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grief*</td>
<td>1 item</td>
<td>5 items Sessions 1, 3-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bereavement Task Activities*</td>
<td>3 items</td>
<td>Sessions 2-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support exchanged in storytelling sessions*</td>
<td>4 items</td>
<td>Sessions 3-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of Second Life for nurses’ grief support*</td>
<td>5 items</td>
<td>12 items Facilitator Survey/Session</td>
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</tbody>
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**Data Collection & Analyses**

**Data Collection**
- Questionnaires administered using online survey instrument
  - Pre-survey within 7 days prior to 1st session
  - Post-survey within 7 days of last session
  - Facilitator survey after each session
- Focus Groups
  - Session screen castings audio-video recorded (Camtasia Studio)

**Data Analyses**
- Survey data statistically described (PASW 18)
- Thematic analysis of 15 hours of transcripts (NVivo8)
- Independently reviewed by 3 researchers with consensus

**Results**

- 9 RNs consented & completed all study procedures
  - Age, M=39.5 (SD=10.0)
  - RN years, M=12.3 (SD=8.0)
  - Yrs in oncology, M=8.3 (SD=7.2)
- Nurses reported value in using SL, M=7.8 (SD=2.6)
- Helpful in resolving grief, M=8.4 (SD=1.9)
- Particularly pseudo-disguise of avatar
- Able to use group storytelling format in SL to express own grief

**Cognitive readiness to learn about death**

“I usually feel kinda helpless myself. I don’t know the right thing to say, wish I could do more. So when someone is really receptive to me, I latch onto that and it makes me feel a lot better and like I’m doing something important. And I feel honored. Especially when you’re busy during the day and you don’t really have time to spend with that patient. Today got a comment from a nurse, that the patient said to say thank you for everything, and that she thought about me and she told somebody to make sure they told you thank you. I don’t really feel like I did that much but it’s good to know that. I guess I did. I can’t even remember who she is, was, you know? We probably touch a lot of people’s lives that we don’t realize.”

**Death really takes death experience**

“I had one patient I had taken care of for quite some time. It’s almost like they take you in, you become part of their family, they want to know what’s going on in your life, and they share everything going on in theirs. I remember this one very clearly, I just felt like it was a privilege to be there, and when I got the chance to say goodbye, it was, thank you for allowing me to share in your life and taking an interest in mine. I learned from him, him and his family, I really got to see love, love between him and his wife, him and his daughters. He made it a gracious and joyous thing, not morbid. They were at peace with it, knew it was coming. He was able to pass on his own terms, knowing he did everything he could to make it easier for her [wife], that she was going to be okay.”
“One day I was cleaning out some drawers. I found a large envelope and it was full of poems a patient had given to me, ten or more years ago. I couldn’t remember his name, but his face came to me all of a sudden. Those poems were in my hands and I didn’t know what to do with them, those beautiful poems. I wish I had one to read to you now. Later, I suppose, we still grieve for people that come to mind.

Grief is not always a bad thing—you remember and it brings back memories, so they are not forgotten. You forget the bad things and remember the good things, cherish them. It is a beautiful process when people come back to you, the memories come back to you.”

Limitations

- Pilot study from 1 site
- Technological difficulties may have interfered with intervention fidelity
- Small sample precluded estimates of reliability & validity for questionnaires

Conclusion

- Powerful stories yielded insights into how oncology nurses express and process their grief
- Both nurses and facilitators reported a benefit in using peer storytelling sessions in Second Life in dealing with grief related to the death of patients in their care