



NHS Education for Scotland

Transcript of 'Dr Catherine Calderwood (CMO) speaking about death and bereavement (NES Bereavement Conference, 2019)' video – Dr Catherine Calderwood

I'm Dr Catherine Calderwood, I'm the Chief Medical Officer in Scotland, and so I am advising the government on health policy but I'm also responsible for all the doctors in Scotland and working in the NHS.

Perhaps bereavement and death are one of the final taboos in society. We don't talk about this time of people's lives and yet the two certainties are of course birth and death. We celebrate birth, people remember those times and society celebrates birthdays, a great time for people to remember. We also have the sure certainty of death – people remember that time for the rest of their lives. The families that are left behind are left without somebody, instead of the new life at birth we, we don't deal with that in the same way. We don't acknowledge that people are affected by it and we don't necessarily talk about its inevitability.

We'll often have healthcare professionals very involved at the end of life but often too before that they have the opportunities, of speaking to people and speaking to their families, perhaps introducing a topic which isn't comfortable and perhaps being the people who are able to do that, to guide families at a time when for them, these subjects are frightening, unpalatable and actually they want to not think about it. So, healthcare professionals have a really, unique role here. I think we understand the inevitability sometimes better than those we're caring for, but it's about being able to communicate that to people who are facing something that they really don't want to face.

Healthcare professionals are giving of themselves at a time that's extremely important to others. We can't look after others if we don't look after ourselves. I think all of us remember the times where we were dealing with families at the end of life, where we were in fact also grieving for losing that person, losing that patient who we had got to know, or had cared for. So we need to understand what this does to healthcare professionals; that we're not just coming to work to do an ordinary job every day, and often we ourselves are deeply affected and need perhaps to talk to someone for help, to enable us to give the best care possible.

The film was produced in March 2020 and can be found at www.sad.scot.nhs.uk or <https://vimeo.com/391455065>

For more information visit www.sad.scot.nhs.uk or contact supportarounddeath@nes.scot.nhs.uk

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