**NHS Education for Scotland**

**Transcript of ‘Responding to the Sudden Death of a Doctor in Training - Case Study: Healthcare Chaplain’ Film**

As the on-called Chaplain I was contacted in the early hours of the morning informing me that the body of a young trainee Doctor had been found. It was suspected that the cause of death was suicide. I was being asked for advice on how to handle the situation, how to inform staff and how to support staff and other trainees.

The trainee had recently been dealing with a number of personal issues which had seemed to be affecting their professional practice. There had been some concerns raised by ward staff and so a meeting had been arranged for the next day with their education supervisor and consultant to discuss the situation and also to explore what support could be put in place for the trainee. They’d made it clear to colleagues the day before that, despite reassurance that the aim of the meeting was to help or support them, they were terrified that they were going to get sacked or made to leave medicine. When they left the clinical area the day before, they seemed to be more relaxed and reassured about the meeting the following day.

The trainee’s body was found by police in the grounds of the hospital residence. Other trainees and members of staff had been made aware of events due to police attendance and there was already details on social media about what had happened. The Police had agreed to notify the trainee’s family.

I agreed to meet the duty manager at 7:00 am before staff was due to start at 7:30, as it was important to identify which members of staff needed to be informed and agree what staff should be told. On meeting it was agreed that the ward staff and the deanery staff should be informed first, followed by those who were due to meet with the trainees later that day. It was agreed that we would discuss with the Deanery how to inform peers and colleagues, and that the Chaplain would support a huddle of all trainees over lunchtime and then consultants would be asked to release trainees for 30 minutes to attend. In such circumstances, I think it's important that all involved are given space and are cared for; and it can be a mistake to assume that senior staff may not be affected by the death of a trainee. As such, it is important that someone out with the situation is present to support all involved and provide a clear and calm voice.

After a death like this there could be a huge sense of guilt that we've missed something or somehow failed our colleagues. Healthcare professionals can also feel that they should be able to cope with the intense feeling of grief and guilt following a death. In those very early days people may wish to engage in practical activities that may appear to help make the situation better. It’s important to gently remind people to just take some time as there may be times in the weeks ahead to consider more practical ways of remembering the person who has died. It's important to allow people the time and space to take in what has happened, to acknowledge their feelings and identify that they’re having a normal reaction to an abnormal situation. Do not try and stop tears. And when people ask the big why questions, don't try to answer them. We may never know why. Give psychological first aid and space for people to tell their stories and their relationship with the person who has died.

Make sure people are safe to return to work; thinking about whether they are fit and safe to carry out clinical work. The Chaplain is often seen as the safe person, the person who knows what to say or do in such situations, as such we are often given a unique role in supporting all staff by assuring that all parties are cared for. Spiritual care is about enabling people to hear their stories, it's about being present and being able to cope with the not knowing and not being able to answer the questions. It’s about coping with the silence and the tears and holding people in their pain.

The film was produced in May 2022 and can be found at [www.sad.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk) or <https://vimeo.com/711639978>

For more information visit [www.sad.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk) or contact [supportarounddeath@nes.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:supportarounddeath@nes.scot.nhs.uk)

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