**NHS Education for Scotland**

**Transcript of ‘Perspective of an Admin Team Leader Experiencing Bereavement in the Workplace’ Film**

As we worked in an open plan office, it was easy to scan over the floor to see if staff members were at their desk. I remember that it was a Monday morning, and a colleague noticed at 11am that Kate, one of our team, had not turned up for work. The policy was that if staff were not coming in to work, they would let me know by 10am. However, I hadn't heard anything from Kate that day.

As she wasn't due to be on leave, I tried to make contact with her by phone. The number rang out and I tried several times, but it just kept ringing out. By this time, I was concerned but continued to try and contact her. Eventually the phone was answered by Kate's husband, Paul. I explained who I was, and that Kate had not turned up for work. Paul seemed very upset but managed to say that Kate had just passed away. It was a total shock, and I didn't know what to say.

He just asked that I didn't tell anyone at this point as this was sudden and he needed to let people know. This was the point that was extremely difficult for me. I knew this information, which was extremely upsetting, but I couldn't let anyone know.

At that point I really just felt on my own. Once I got my thoughts together, I did speak to my line manager, who was understanding. He also got in touch with our senior manager to advise of the situation. I was in a daze, and people kept asking about Kate and I didn't know what to say. I was giving out mixed messages, and on reflection was probably rather abrupt when replying to them.

I contacted HR, which was difficult. At this point in time we had to contact a generic number and an HR adviser would be appointed. I eventually managed to get to speak with someone by briefly explaining the situation. I explained that the family had asked that I didn't let colleagues know until they advised we could do so.

This was hard, and I asked HR at what point should this continue. Could I contact them again or should I just wait until they contacted me? I was told just to wait. And the next day I again had no further information. By lunchtime I didn't know what to do. Advice from HR was that I needed to respect the family's wishes. Then in the afternoon I was contacted to let me know that I could inform others.

I told my team first, and obviously they were very upset. Some chose to take time away from the office, but it was difficult when dealing with the welfare of a number of staff at one time. Usually if dealing with a family bereavement it’s on a one-to-one basis. Other senior staff had to be told and, again, this was done by me. It was challenging but then they appreciated how difficult it had been. I was obviously looking very tense and worried and giving out signals, but I didn't know that at the time.

Perhaps I appeared insensitive. While people were asking me if I was okay, I was giving the standard response, "yes, everything's fine". But I don't think I was. I was stressed and sad, and I kept everything to myself. On reflection, I should have spoken to someone professional for support, although I'm not sure who that would have been in the organisation. I also had to deal with the practicalities of form filling, but I felt on my own when dealing with Paul around entitlements, etc.

A time was arranged for a meeting with HR and him, however HR were unable to make the arranged time, and no one was able to step in, and that meant we had to wait. It was rather embarrassing in such a delicate and sensitive situation, and I felt let down, and it was a bit isolating.

My reflections on this happening are that managers need guidance to point staff in the right direction when they don't know where to turn. I think I dealt with the situation, given a number of personal experiences. If people don't have experience of this situation, it could be very challenging when not knowing where to go for help and support.

The film was produced in October 2023 and can be found at [www.sad.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk/) or <https://vimeo.com/906400979>

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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