

“The Open Window”

The Importance of Communication in Palliative
Care

With

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Windows

- Some open wide and give a great view, sliding back at just a touch
- Some take more effort to open
- Some open just a little way then stop because of guards
- Some are draped over and covered with curtains
- Some are stuck shut by layers of paint
- And some don't open at all, stuck fast and covered by cobwebs.

In Palliative Care we aim to provide “holistic”
Care –

This must include

Care of the body

Care of the spirit

Care of the soul (thoughts and emotions)

Grief is universal in Palliative Care

Think of a “big” grief of your own

THEN

Remember that each patient, family/whanau
member, carer will be experiencing grief in
their own way – think of the metaphor of
the windows.....

Who do they choose to open their window to?

A study in a large English teaching hospital showed that the group most commonly confided in were the cleaners.....

“The one common thing we can be sure of in grief is that it can be described as a time of chaos”

“We can be empathetic, but we are helpless to change anything. To practice helpless empathy is the best we can offer people in grief” Mel McKissock, The Grief Centre, Sydney

When providing Palliative Care we can choose to “do”

- “Doing” gives us something to hide behind
- “Doing” may be where are more trained, confident and comfortable
- “Doing” is usually the safer option.

When we are “doing” we choose to ignore even the widest open window, and rush past any opportunity to discuss emotions.

Or we can watch for the window of opportunity!

This can mean

More exposure of self

May open us up to our own memories, issues and unhealed hurts

Puts us onto the same level as the person we are supporting

We are empathetic but helpless (no pill or bandage or words or theories work!)

Being requires more courage

Some basic skills:

- First recognize the opportunity – the window opening
....then
- Consider confidentiality and scan for distractions
- Still yourself and focus
- Remain on equal footing
- Don't be afraid to set a boundary i.e. "I can be with you for half an hour then I'll have to go because"
- If you are with a group be aware of groupings, exclusions, who is talking and who is quiet
- Always, always watch body language, theirs and yours. Remember, the mouth speaks, the body screams.

- Listen carefully, attentively with your whole self
- Ask open questions
- Stay with the moment (it's like dancing, and they are leading)
- Look for natural clues to end the time, remind them that you'll have to go in a few minutes because...
- Thank them for allowing you to be with them
- Leave opportunities to walk through the window with them again.
- Practice self care!

Being with people when they open the window to their pain is a privilege we must never become blasé to.

Count it an honour each time a window is opened to you and you are invited in, however short or long a time it takes!

PIVOTAL MOMENTS!

We will be remembered