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Written Assessment 2: Reflection on Loss and Grief

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Reflective writing can be described as your personal response to experiences, opinions, events or new information involving your thoughts and feelings (University of New South Wales [UNSW], 2016). This reflection will explore the loss I suffered when my best friend's father passed away whom I was very close with. I will be drawing upon the Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1988) to elaborate my grieving processes and to explore different ideas and approaches towards grief and loss of a loved one. Pomeroy (2011) states that grief can be defined as a complex experience that is the consequence of a significant loss of a person or object. It is the natural, emotional response to losing someone close to you that each individual will experience at some point in his or her life. Expressing compassion and understating when supporting someone suffering grief and loss issues is particularly relevant in today's uncertain environment (Pomeroy, 2011).

## **DESCRIPTION**

A close friend of mine's father Neville, had been suffering from poor health due to a heavy smoking and drinking lifestyle. At age 67 he was suffering bad influenza, which encouraged him to make an appointment with his local GP. Chest –X-rays were performed and deemed to be slightly alarming which lead him to be taken to the community hospital. Once there, he began suffering a cardiac arrest, which lasted over half an hour. Hospital staff performed CPR, however were unable to save Neville and he deceased due to a heart attack.

## **THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS**

This was my friend's and I's first experience of death. Over the years I was lucky enough to have created a strong relationship with Neville. He was a well-liked

husband, father and friend and his death was sudden and relatively unexpected. The nursing staff allowed my friend and her mother to sit in the room with Neville after he had passed as they were noticeably distressed, agitated and unable to disguise their emotions. This allowed Neville's family members to reflect upon what had just occurred. My friend described feeling extreme sadness that her father had just passed away and that she was also battling with thoughts of how to express this devastating news to extended family and friends. My friend was unaware of how to cope or react having never seen a dead body and not experiencing death before. I felt inexperienced in how to deal with the emotions she was experiencing. Over the course of the day, I experienced feelings of disbelief, stress and anxiety.

Park (2015) expresses that characteristics of grieving include denial, guilt, anger, despair, feelings of worthlessness, crying and inability to concentrate. My friend experienced majority of these traits in the process of grieving her father. My personal thoughts and feelings at the time of the incident included similar feelings of grief and sadness. In reflection of this event, I was not prepared for experiencing first death of someone I was close with. I was unaware of how to cope during the incident and therefore suffered emotional distress. Kübler-Ross and Kessler (1973), states that the five-stages of grief are essential to one's emotional status when experiencing grief and loss. With these key assets being presented to individuals, these stages can be adapted to one's personal experience with death and dying. When Neville had passed my initial thoughts and feelings included denial that her father was no longer here. However, these feelings and thoughts then quickly turned into anger towards the situation that had occurred.

## **EVALUTAION**

Prior to and after Neville's death, there were a number of problems and issues that arose. When Neville first presented to his local GP suffering influenza his vital observations were attended to and a chest x-ray was performed. Following this, the GP examined the results and suggested to Neville he make his way to the community hospital as soon as possible. Upon arrival, the X-ray was handed to the nurse on shift, which was expected to be handed to the Dr on the ward at the time. Bad communication between the nurses and doctors then occurred when the doctor never saw the X-ray that was performed on Neville prior to admission. The doctor commented that if they had have received the X-ray earlier they may have been able to do more to prevent Neville's passing.

The nurses apologised to the family for the miscommunication, however, this put extra stress on the family and didn't allow them to feel closure. Leonard, Graham and Bonacum (2004) express that effective communication and teamwork is essential for the delivery of high quality, safe patient care. Along with this they also discuss that communication failures are an extremely common cause of unintentional patient harm. Another issue that arose at the time of Neville's passing was that there was only one doctor present on the ward at the Community hospital that day. This lead to increased pressure on the doctor and more stress on the family. The nurses and doctor were all very supportive towards the family after the event had occurred which allowed me to feel more at ease with the extreme emotions I was feeling at the time.

## **ANALYSIS**

Through analysis of the events that led to Neville's death and the actions to occur after, there are a number of things I could make of the situation. Through reflecting on her father's death I learnt the importance of communication between all areas of a healthcare team and how easily miscommunication can occur. Both my friend and I displayed similar reactions to the situation however, as time passed I went into an emotional grieving stage and she shut herself off completely. Many factors can affect how you react to death and the way in which you grieve. These include the type of relationship you had with the person, your gender, your cultural background and your age (ReachOut Australia, 2018). Another aspect that I could make from the situation was that if her father had of passed in a different way my grieving process would have been different. If the situation had been less intense and rushed it would have allowed myself and my friend to properly grieve the loss of her loved one.

## **CONCLUSION**

Following the incident, when reflecting upon what happened and the feelings expressed by my friend, it can be confirmed that Neville received the best care and support by the nursing team in his final moments. In conclusion, I reflected upon the negative component of the situation and that was losing a loved one and having to adapt to a new lifestyle. Along with this I had to endure the pathway of grief and battle emotions and feelings I had never experienced before. Fears and Schneider (1981) express that recognition of grief is a significant step towards growth. The loss of her father demonstrated to myself that I am a lot stronger mentally than I had thought. Although this incident was sad and emotional I did find it to be overall quite

positive. It has enabled my friend and I to learn from the emotions we experienced and build strengths in dealing with similar situations.

## **ACTION PLAN**

By discovering that the emotions I felt following my first experience with loss and grief are common, it allowed me to gain confidence and reassurance that I would cope better next time an experience like this occurred. By reflecting on my experience with loss and grief I learnt the importance of taking time out and not to be afraid to ask for help. Beyond Blue, (2018) suggest that taking care of your physical health, talking to friends and family and doing things you enjoy are ways in which you can help yourself through grief and loss.

“People invited to talk about their experience often found great relief in expressing their fear and anger and were able to move towards a state of acceptance and peace” (Kübler-Ross, 1997). By having the education and the knowledge of the available services to me can assist greatly in the process of grieving. Death is a natural part of life and it is almost certain that I will find myself in another emotional situation involving loss and grief again. When this does arise again in my life I feel I would have a better understanding of my thoughts and feelings along with how to cope with the situation after reflecting on the emotions I endured with the passing of my friend’s father.

By writing this reflective essay, I have gained knowledge in understanding my thoughts and feelings that I experienced during a situation of loss and grief. The Gibbs Reflective Cycle allows a person to think methodically about the experiences they had during a certain situation. By reflecting on the loss of my friend's father I witnessed grief from not only my perspective but of hers as well which distinctively highlighted different aspects of grief and how they affect people in various ways. The process of reflection encouraged insight and learning for myself and allowed me to make better sense of a loss and grief situation in my life.

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