

Educational Visit to the Crematorium for Hospice Staff



Murdoch S Rev¹, Dr Haraldsdottir E²

¹Hospice Chaplain, Strathcarron Hospice

²Head of Department of Education, Practice Development and Research, Strathcarron Hospice



Background

- Education around issues related to death and dying is an important part of professional development for palliative care practitioners.
- It is well recognised that in order to care in an open and honest way for those who are dying and their families health care professionals needs to be confident in speaking about issues related to the process of dying.
- An education session that included visits to the crematorium was offered to clinical staff working at Strathcarron Hospice.

Aims

To inform clinical staff in relation to the actual processes of cremation in order to enhance their confidence and ability to support and inform patients and families who wish to talk about the option of the patient being cremated.

Method

- In consultation with the Local Crematorium staff visits were organised for maximum 10 number of staff per visit. Five visits took place with 39 members of staff attending in total.
- The duration of the visit was 1 hour and included the Chapel, cremators, Control Room, and post cremation process.
- This education event was evaluated with a questioner after the visit.

Results

- 19 participants filled out and returned the questioner. The visit was very well evaluated.
- 17 participants responded that the visit was *Very Informative*, and 2 said it was *Informative*.
- The visit equipped participants with information that they felt was highly relevant to end of life care and their role in supporting patients and families. Evident in the thematic analysis below:

Greater understanding of the cremation process:

“ I thought the crematorium tour was excellent it answered questions that I wanted answered for years.

“ The tour answered certain unanswered questions and [challenged] my own [previous] assumptions.

Increased confidence related to supporting patients & families:

“ Knowledge gained from the visit was invaluable and will help with End of Life discussions with patients and families and allow them to make informed choices and ease their anxiety.

“ I feel equipped to deal with situations that may arise that patients and family wish to explore cremation.

Dispelling myths about the cremation process:

“ [The visit] clarified many myths and I was given a much greater understanding of the whole process that will ultimately be advantageous to my patients and their carers/relatives.

“ [The visit has] taken away all my preconceived thoughts of what happens i.e. bodies being cremated together. [I am] now able to be honest to patients and families if they enquire re: cremation.

Increasing confidence in speaking about issues related to the cremation process:

“ [I am now] able to understand more clearly the process of cremation and following the last steps of the patients and my own family members' journey.

“ [The visit was] a valuable learning experience as I now have a fuller understanding on the post death process. This I feel will enable me to guide relatives by providing accurate reassurance.

Conclusion

It is evident that educational input round the post death process is highly valuable for staff in terms of building their confidence to journey with patients and their families at End-of-Life.

As a result of overall positive evaluation of the pilot educational visits, this has now been added into the Hospice Education programme for all Clinical Staff.