

Absent Friends Project

Patient Belonging Bags



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Abbreviated Abstract: The aim of this project was improving the experiences of families and carers, following the bereavement of loved ones in hospital, with all in-patient areas using dignified and respectful boxes/bags to return patients' valuables and belongings to families and carers instead of plastic bags.

We worked in collaboration with our local volunteer centre, local companies and communities across the Western Isles to design and sew bags for the project



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Previous work, challenge, and approach

A chance conversation between two staff members acknowledging how uncomfortable it felt to hand back belongings in plastic bags after someone had died led to a meeting with others who wanted to make a change.

We collected feedback from families and staff and this demonstrated their feelings about the plastic bags being impersonal and need for change.

'The plastic bag was very impersonal, I was angry when I looked at it and saw my loved one's belongings in it, I still haven't been able to open it'



Techniques and Methods

We established a working group to include volunteers and our communities to work collaboratively to design and produce the bag. We made a successful bid to the Building on the Best programme for materials. We tested several prototypes in ward areas across the Western Isles deciding on the bag most suitable.



Results and Conclusions

Outcome: This project has allowed the communities of the Western Isles to focus on a positive message of the importance, when someone dies, of being respectful to their loss and their memories of the person and acknowledging this with the people who are important to them

‘What a difference this will make to families in the Western Isles. The bag and the box are so important for personal belongings and the family can put them away and bring out every so often to reflect on the memories of their loved one, the coloured bags are amazing and so personal...’

‘The patient bag would be a good idea and it would take away the feeling of dismay and that we have memories we can look at or put away in a safe place’.



‘The bag and box are a great idea, even if I couldn’t face it I could put them away till I am ready to look at them, but I know they are safe and I can process my grief’.