

Dying Matters Awareness Week 2023: death, dying and grief in the workplace

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Many people still find it difficult to discuss death and dying; such concepts can evoke different thoughts, feelings and meaning to each individual. To help with our anxieties, this month's Dying Matters Awareness has dedicated a week for people around the UK and the four nations to come together and talk about everything death and dying. This year, the Dying Matters Awareness Week, with the theme 'Death, dying and grief in the workplace', has been moved to 8–14 May in view of King Charles III's coronation. Hospice UK claims that 57% of employees will have experienced a bereavement in the last 5 years, and everyday more than 600 people quit their work to look after older and disabled relatives (Hospice UK, 2023). Given these figures, Hospice UK claim that only one in five managers feel confident supporting someone experiencing grief and bereavement. These figures make for a difficult reading and only signal the need to train and support managers in the workplace. Therefore, the awareness week opens a good opportunity for managers and employees to have open conversation with others about death and how people perceive it. Talking openly about death before someone dies is a way of softening this somewhat difficult and taboo topic and paving a way for supportive conversation with employees after a death has occurred.

Although the theme for this year focuses on the workplace, it should not stop us all from engaging and sharing thoughts and ideas around death and dying. Colleagues teaching in universities can initiate conversations with students to ensure death does not remain a taboo topic. Colleagues in the NHS, Nursing and Care homes can also engage in discussions about death and dying. There is no right or wrong way on how we discuss death. Therefore, it is essential that we approach the topic from all our diverse backgrounds and learn from each other's perspectives. I appreciate the difficulty of starting such conversations at home, within our communities, and what the Dying Matters Awareness organisers have done well this year (and in previous years), is to provide ideas and resources to support anyone who wants to get involved in talking during the awareness week with activities, conversations, small gatherings at home and large gatherings at work and social clubs. For more details about activities and resources, please access their [website](#). You may find it easier to organise

these events with other colleagues as a group, which can also act as a source of support for you. You can visit their [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#), where you can even sign up to receive regular updates.

Colleagues working in the community will have 'intelligence' about the people they care for and how best to support them and initiate discussions around death and dying. I cannot stress enough how important it is for colleagues in the community to feel able to talk openly about death and dying, so that helping others does not intrinsically affect them. Of course, we have to be mindful that encouraging people to talk about death and dying may provoke emotional responses/reactions, some of which will require support thereafter, and community nurses and doctors already know the patients they visit and what extra support they can offer. Managers of community staff should acknowledge the need to support nurses and doctors too and ensure that every effort is made to enhance their well-being. This means that every manager should feel confident supporting staff who are engaged in open conversations with patients about death and dying. In their annual reviews, managers should be bold enough to list death and dying as an area they need training and support with, if they are to effectively support their own staff. In a climate of staff shortage, lack of funding and increasing strikes in the NHS, such intimate and sensitive conversations are easy to shelf, but doing so only makes the problem worse and prolongs the agony of death as a taboo. Dying Matters Awareness Week gives us an opportunity to reflect and reframe our approach to death and dying in the workplace—let us seize the moment. **BJCN**

Facebook. Hospice UK. 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/hospiceuk> (accessed 18 April 2023)

Hospice UK. Dying Matters Awareness Week. 2023. <https://www.hospiceuk.org/our-campaigns/dying-matters/dying-matters-awareness-week> (accessed 18 April 2023)

Instagram. Hospice UK. 2023. <https://www.instagram.com/dyingmatters/> (accessed 18 April 2023)

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