

Nursing Notes

November 29, 2011

Helping Nurses deal with death and dying

Filed under: [Nursing](#) — Shirley @ 7:02 am

Tags: [Death](#), [Death Care](#), [Embalming](#), [Funeral](#), [Laguna Hills California](#), [Morgue](#), [United States](#)

I recently was contacted about running a story here on an interesting situation. This is a topic that all nurses must deal with at one time or another. We don't talk much about it, and maybe we feel uncomfortable about dealing with it. However, death and dying are part of living and we, as nurses, are usually there to help the family deal with this trauma.

It's seems really nice that a mortuary would be willing to help nurses learn about and learn to deal with this situation. Because of my past experiences and the experiences of many of my sister nurses, I am posting his article here for your education. Let me know what you think about this topic and if you want me to continue to offer guest postings here.

When a death occurs at a hospital or in hospice and people have questions about what happens and what they should do, who do they ask? Usually the first person of authority they see: a nurse.

A difficult yet inevitable conversation, what can nurses do to prepare for these questions? O'Connor Mortuary, serving Southern California's families since 1898, offers CE credits for a tour entitled "Unmasking the Mysteries." The tour consists of an informative visit to the mortuary and an in-depth presentation on the processes that go on behind closed doors. Dealing with mortuaries is often intimidating for families and nurses alike, but this tour, along with other workshops offered by the mortuary, opens the line of communication and gives nurses a chance to ask questions and fully understand what goes on to better answer the questions of their patients and patients' families.

If interested in interviewing Neil or if you'd like information about upcoming "Unmasking the Mysteries" tours, please let me know.

Helping a family that has suffered the loss of loved one can be incredibly complicated. Many family members, in their hour of need, may ask a number of very difficult questions as they attempt to deal with both the emotional and logistical challenges of a death in the family. Neil O'Connor, CEO of [O'Connor Mortuary](#) in Laguna Hills, Calif., has worked with many nurses to steer these families in the right direction as they deal with the myriad questions that come following a death in the family. Here are some common questions you may encounter, along with some straightforward answers.

My loved one has passed away. What do I do now?

If the patient has preplanned their funeral, you should simply instruct the family to call the mortuary to notify them of the passing. Sometimes the family assumes the hospital will notify the mortuary, but for safe measure, you should urge a family member to take that first step.

If the patient has not preplanned their funeral, you should ask them if they've selected a mortuary. Most hospitals have a list of local mortuaries they can provide. Families are often overwhelmed and don't know where to begin, but choosing the right provider is an important step in planning a funeral. Hospitals typically give families 1-2 days to choose a funeral home and transfer the care of their loved one from hospital to mortuary, so encourage them to take their time and ask questions about the care they'll be receiving.

Once the mortuary is engaged to bring someone into their care, it will transport the person to the facility. A written release from the family granting the mortuary permission to do so may be required depending on the hospital.

My loved one has passed away. What do I do now?

If the patient has preplanned their funeral, you should simply instruct the family to call the mortuary to notify them of the passing. Sometimes the family assumes the hospital will notify the mortuary, but for safe measure, you should urge a family member to take that first step.

If the patient has not preplanned their funeral, you should ask them if they've selected a mortuary. Most hospitals have a list of local mortuaries they can provide. Families are often overwhelmed and don't know where to begin, but choosing the right provider is an important step in planning a funeral. Hospitals typically give families 1-2 days to choose a funeral home and transfer the care of their loved one from hospital to mortuary, so encourage them to take their time and ask questions about the care they'll be receiving.

Once the mortuary is engaged to bring someone into their care, it will transport the person to the facility. A written release from the family granting the mortuary permission to do so may be required depending on the hospital.

How soon should I plan a funeral or memorial service?

It is recommended that the funeral occur within 4-6 days of the death, but at O'Connor, we encourage anywhere from 5-10 days. This event will commemorate the life of the loved one, and we don't want anyone to rush through the planning of this one-time ceremony. We encourage people to take their time and get the details in order to ensure that service will accurately reflect the loved one's life and provide the best opportunity for remembrance to family and friends.

What is the best way for me to inform friends and family of my loved one's passing?

In addition to your many responsibilities as a nurse, you are often looked to for emotional support as well. When we hear this question, we advise families to personally call those closest members of their family circle, and then to create a "phone tree" to inform extended friends and family. Enlisting the help of friends and family will help alleviate some of the stress.

Is embalming required by law?

Embalming is not required by law unless they select arrangements that require the body to be embalmed, such as public or private viewing or shipping to another state or country via a common carrier. There are also some occasions when the Coroner's or Medical Examiner's office will embalm a body for investigative reasons.

What if There is not a chosen a mortuary?

My best advice is not to select a mortuary from the internet or the yellow pages at 3:00 a.m. It is very difficult to make sense out of anything when you are working through a crisis. Even if you have not selected a mortuary and a death has occurred, you still have time to find the right provider for you and your family. Remember, even if you select a mortuary and your loved one is taken into their care, you can still select another company if you change your mind. You do not have to stay with your first choice if you don't feel comfortable with them.

What questions should I ask to ensure the funeral home is looking out for my best interests?

Here are four key questions to ask over the phone or in person.

1. How will you take care of me?
2. Why should I trust you?
3. What makes you different?
4. Will you guarantee your services & memorial products 100% or money back?

If they cannot answer these questions off the tip of their head, they probably are not living these core values.

Do you have questions you'd like to have answered by Neil O'Connor? Ask in the comments section and we'll get them answered!