



European Association for Cancer Education

32nd Annual Scientific Meeting

When A Co-Worker Is Diagnosed with End Stage Cancer

CAROLYN MESSNER*

This presentation highlights institutional support, training and education of interprofessional oncology colleagues to provide guidance with compassion to co-workers diagnosed with end stage cancer, developing a transformative workplace model of support.

Oncology healthcare professionals spend more waking, productive hours in the workplace than at home. Work not only provides income, but recognition, friendship with co-workers, meaning and purpose in providing oncology, psychosocial, palliative and supportive treatment.

What happens when a devastating cancer diagnosis impacts one of our own? Despite a number of laws that may protect the rights of employees with cancer and their caregivers, numerous challenges confront anyone seriously ill with cancer, their co-workers and workplace.

When over a period of years, a number of co-workers developed aggressive cancers that led to end-of-life care; the workplace built a transformative approach to meet the needs of all impacted, including the ill employees, their caregivers and the shared grief of the staff. Confidentiality was strictly maintained for employees who wished their illness to be confidential. As soon as the family notified the workplace of their co-workers' death, the workplace gave staff the opportunity, if they wished to attend their colleagues' funeral or memorial service.

For employees, who provided permission to inform their co-workers about their need for end-of-life care, there was an outpouring from staff to share their collective experience. Key staff met with Human Resources/Personnel to develop a transformative response to their co-worker's dying. This committee developed creative strategies to share their feelings and admiration for their dying co-worker including: Memory Note Box, Photo Album, paired visits, technical assistance, and outreach to family and partners. These strategies will be explicated in this presentation with goal of providing attendees a replication model. The efficacy of this Transformative Paradigm will be described, with case vignettes, lessons learned, replication handouts and selected bibliography.

* CANCERCARE, 275 SEVENTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10001, USA

E-mail address: CMESSNER@CANCERCARE.ORG