Physicians and nurses grieve too: Loss, grief and mourning

Kimberly Richardson
Widows of Opportunity, USA

There is lack of direction when it comes to physicians and nurses coping with their own grief connected with the loss of a patient. It is unprofessional to cry or show too much emotion. The textbook of medicine teaches students to distance themselves and create protective boundaries. Being emotional is a sign of weakness. This approach is impractical and damaging. Physicians and nurses are human and experience feelings of helplessness, guilt, uncertainty, isolation, disappointment, and depression after the death of a patient. These feelings can lead to medical errors and burnout if not addressed. There is limited literature that explores physicians' responses to the death of a patient. Research shows that most people can recover from loss on their own through the passage of time if they have helpful strategies and social support.