

SA Palliative Care Community Pharmacy Update

A joint initiative of South Australian Palliative Care Services

Most people might only care for someone who is dying a handful of times; they may approach their pharmacist to identify how to seek bereavement supports.

Claire

The previous [update \(222kb pdf\)](#) discussed the carer's role in managing breakthrough symptoms in the terminal phase.

You learn from Claire that her father Bill died comfortably at home, a fortnight ago. The people that mattered most to him were present. Claire informs you that she's feeling "lost and emotional".

Bereavement support

"Bereavement support" refers to the support offered to caregivers, after the person's death.

Everyone reacts differently to death. While sadness is expected, studies have shown for most bereaved, normal social supports will be appropriate. The health and emotional consequences associated with their loss will resolve over a few months.

Some bereaved may experience complicated grief or persistent complex bereavement disorder. This can lead to serious complications if left unrecognised. Symptoms include:

- > Deep sorrow and emotional pain;
- > Extreme avoidance of reminders of the loss;
- > Feeling alone and empty;
- > Fixation with the deceased and/or circumstances of the death;
- > Loss of purpose of meaning without the deceased;
- > Protracted acute grief, such as frequent intense yearning; and
- > Trouble accepting the death.

While the community pharmacist is unable to respond directly to these, there are things that can be done:

- > Touch base with the bereaved when they come to the pharmacy;
- > Acknowledge their feelings;
- > Identify family and friends who are looking out for them;
- > Identify resources they can read (see Useful Resources); and
- > Contact their GP or the Specialist Palliative Care team to flag concerns.

Professional supports are available; access to these depends upon the local services available. If the deceased was registered with a specialist palliative care service, bereavement support is often offered. Alternatively, discussion with the GP may result in a mental health management plan.

Useful Resources

- > [Griefline](#): 1300 845 745
- > [Dementia Australia](#)
- > [CareSearch - Bereavement, Grief and Loss](#)
- > [Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement](#)

For more information

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This update is intended to provide practical up to date and factual information relating to pharmacy and medicines management in the setting of Palliative Care and is based on critical review of available evidence. Individual patient circumstances must be considered when applying this information. Please feel free to distribute this update further to interested colleagues.

