

Document #10

A STATEMENT OF ASSUMPTIONS AND PRINCIPLES CONCERNING EDUCATION ABOUT LIFE-THREATENING ILLNESS, DEATH, DYING, AND BEREAVEMENT FOR VOLUNTEERS AND NON-PROFESSIONALS

Introduction

These assumptions and principles are intended as an aid for those concerned with education about life-threatening illness, death, dying, and bereavement for volunteers and non-professionals.

This education can be applied to a wide range of loss experiences. It is designed to prepare volunteers and non-professionals to function effectively in diverse contexts including one-to-one interactions, mutual aid, self-help groups, and support services.

ASSUMPTION: A statement accepted as fact on the basis of commonly observed experience.

PRINCIPLE: A collective judgment as to the proper response to the assumption.

Assumptions

184. Many people facing life-threatening illness, death, dying, or bereavement adapt satisfactorily if they have ready access to adequate support and understanding from caring family, friends, and other informal community contacts.

Principles

Many people facing life-threatening illness, death, dying, or bereavement will not require the services of professionals to help cope with their losses or altered circumstances.

185. Capable volunteers and non-professionals provide supportive, informational, and practical services that many people dealing with life-threatening illness, death, dying, or bereavement view as helpful.

Access to services provided by volunteers and non-professionals may be especially important for those experiencing distress who feel they have inadequate support (in terms of quality and/or quantity) from personal and/or social support networks.

186. Not all individuals are capable of assuming a formal helping role with those dealing with the stresses of life-threatening illness, death, dying or bereavement.

Prescreening of applicants for education and training programs is essential to ascertain that personal motivation for wishing to be a helper is appropriate and that individuals possess necessary personal qualities such as empathy, sensitivity, and maturity.

187. Not all individuals who may be capable of assuming a formal helping role possess the information or skills needed to enable them to offer effective support to those dealing with the stresses of life-threatening illness, death, dying, or bereavement.

Appropriate education and training are required for:

- a) volunteers and non-professionals reaching out to those dealing with life-threatening illness, death, dying, bereavement, and
- b) managers or workers in non-professional services for these groups.

Education should be provided to volunteers and non-professionals to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to provide effective support to those dealing with life-threatening illness, death, dying, or bereavement.

Appropriate education should:

- a) draw upon the life experiences and individual capacities of potential volunteers and non-professionals,
- b) promote awareness of and sensitivity to the needs of those to be served,
- c) develop skills in dealing with the death-related dimensions of the experience of those served, and
- d) promote understanding in volunteers and non-professionals of their own death-related needs and means of meeting them.

188. There is a continuum of knowledge and experience related to life-threatening illness, death, dying, and bereavement.

For the maximum benefit of those being helped, the education of volunteers and non-professional workers should include knowledge about the dynamics and issues germane to all of these phases, not just the particular area upon which they plan to focus their efforts.

189. Individuals who have had personal experience with life-threatening illness, death, dying, or bereavement, and who have adapted satisfactorily (regardless of their education or other aspects of their background) may have a unique appreciation of the stresses and problems of others facing similar situations.

190. Lay persons and non-professionals have initiated a variety of programs aimed at the provision of mutual aid, self-help, and support services for those dealing with life-threatening illness, death, dying, and bereavement.

Education about life-threatening illness, death, dying, or bereavement for volunteers and non-professionals should reflect this fact and its importance in the supportive process.

Education about life-threatening illness, death, dying, and bereavement should include information about:

- a) the benefits and hazards of mutual aid programs conducted by or involving lay persons and non-professionals in central roles,
- b) the audiences for whom they are thought to be helpful,
- c) the development, modification, and/or implementation of appropriate models for a particular community or culture, and
- d) how such programs operate.

Education should also address:

- a) the roles of professionals in relationship to non-professional programs,
- b) the roles of non-professionals in relationship to professional programs, and
- c) ways in which cooperation and collaboration may be helpful to all concerned.

191. Ongoing information and support are needed by those who work in fields where knowledge is developing rapidly and where stress is likely.

Continuing education and support are necessary for volunteers and non-professionals who work with people dealing with life-threatening illness, death, dying, or bereavement; such education and support can include access to appropriate professional and community resources for information, consultation, and referral.

192. In general, there is a public interest in obtaining information about coping with losses, life-threatening illness, death, dying, or bereavement.

Educators with appropriate knowledge and skills in these areas should encourage and participate in education aimed at various groups in their communities.

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