

MODULE: GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT: A PRACTICAL APPROACH

Case Scenario – Adrienne Macpherson

Scenario 1

Adrienne is a 68-year-old woman. She lives with her husband Andrew, age 79, in a modest bungalow in a rural area about 10 minutes from town. Andrew was diagnosed with lung cancer with metastases to liver and bone 10 months ago. Andrew had been feeling unwell for several months before seeking medical attention. He now is very weak and spends most of his time in bed. He has pain that is poorly controlled and eats very little. At times, he is quite confused.

Adrienne and Andrew have been married for 46 years. This is Adrienne's second marriage. She was married for two years to Pierre, a soldier in the army who was killed in Korea. Adrienne was left with one child, a daughter Isabel now age 50. Three years after Pierre's death she met Andrew at work and they married two years later. Adrienne and Andrew had three children, a son Alistair now age 43, a son Jean age 36 and a daughter Anne who died in a motor vehicle accident 10 years ago at age 24. Isabel lives in town nearby but Jean lives in Seattle.

Adrienne worked as a clerk in a department store for many years before retiring 10 years ago because of health problems, rheumatoid arthritis. Andrew was an accountant with his own small firm. They now live on their small pensions.

Scenario 2

"Doctor? Sorry to bother you but this is Isabel, Andrew Macpherson's stepdaughter. First of all, I would like to thank you for the care you gave my Dad. He died very peacefully at home thanks to you. It meant a lot to all of us and we still miss him a lot. Oh, well life is like that isn't it?"

"Why I called you as well was to talk about my Mom, Adrienne. It has been about six months since Dad died. She really is not getting any better. I am really worried about her. I try to see her every day now if I can. She is just sitting there in a corner chair most of the time. She eats very little and the house is a mess. She just doesn't seem to care any more and that is not like her at all. When I talk about my kids, she occasionally brightens up but then she begins to cry. I have asked her to go and see you but she hasn't made an appointment. I finally called and made her an appointment to see you next week. I just wanted to fill you in. My brothers and I are very concerned."

"Thanks for filling me in, Isabel. Are you coming with her? I think that would be helpful."

Detailed Case Scenario

Scenario One

Adrienne is a 68-year-old woman. She lives with her husband Andrew, age 79, in a modest bungalow in a rural area about 10 minutes from town. Andrew was diagnosed with lung cancer with metastases to liver and bone 10 months ago. Andrew had been feeling unwell for several months before seeking medical attention. He now is very weak and spends most of his time in bed. He has pain that is poorly controlled and eats very little. At times, he is quite confused. There is a suspicion that he has brain metastases but his wife and family feel there is no need for further investigations. His physicians agree.

Adrienne was born in Montréal and she has several brothers and sisters still in Québec. Adrienne and Andrew have been married for 46 years. This is Adrienne's second marriage. She was married for 2 years to Pierre, a soldier in the army who was killed in Korea. Adrienne was left with one child, a daughter Isabel now age 50. Three years after Pierre's death she met Andrew at work and they married two years later. Adrienne and Andrew had three children, a son Alistair now age 43, a son Jean age 36 and a daughter Anne who died in a motor vehicle accident 10 years ago at age 24. Isabel lives in town nearby but Jean lives in Seattle. The Macphersons have 8 grandchildren.

Andrew has been a heavy smoker for many years. He has had hypertension and ischemic heart disease for about ten years. He was a heavy drinker for a number of years but he stopped when Adrienne and he separated for a brief period of time. He does not drink alcohol now. He worked as an accountant with his own small office serving small businesses and doing income tax work. He is Scottish and has two brothers in Scotland. He and Adrienne used to visit them frequently. He is worried about how Adrienne will cope after he dies.

They live on their pensions now.

Adrienne has had rheumatoid arthritis for many years but was able to continue working as a department store clerk until about 10 years ago when she had a flare-up of her disease. She is on multiple medications but has been able to do normal activities of daily living reasonably well with Andrew's help especially with household tasks. She is concerned about how she will be able to cope without Andrew's help. She does not want to bother her children for help. She has had to cope with the death of her first husband and her beloved daughter Anne and feels that she cannot cope with another death in the family.

Their marriage has been quite strong despite the one brief separation. For two years after the death of their daughter Anne they grieved quite openly and they recovered slowly. Their children have been very close despite two of them living far away. They are both Roman Catholic and have attending church fairly regularly.

Scenario 1 Teaching Tips

1. Distribute the case scenario. Allow participants a couple of minutes to read the information or ask one of the participants to read the scenario.
2. Ask what learning issues there are for participants. Have them written on the flipchart.
3. Identify case scenario issues as outlined above.

Case Issues Scenario 1

1. Issue of multiple losses for Adrienne-physical, family, spousal loss.
 2. Physical health.
 3. Potential anger with Andrew for his smoking and lack of attention to his health.
 4. Worry about how she will cope with his dying.
 5. Fear of what will happen to her after.
 6. Need for home care support?
 7. Need to explore family involvement and support.
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4. Ask participants how they would address each of these issues. What resources exist within the community to help?
 5. What resources need to be developed within their community and/or practice that will help their grieving patients? Who can they identify to lead these efforts?

Teaching Tip: Share your own experiences, other models of support that you know of. How did you or others develop these resources? What obstacles did you encounter and how did you overcome them? Who can help? Are there web-based resources you can provide?

6. Review the learning issues that have not been dealt with and assign tasks.

Scenario 2

Adrienne seems very frail. She has lost weight. She responds to questions very slowly. She admits to crying frequently. She says she is very depressed. Her joints are bothering her more than usual. She is eating poorly because her appetite has decreased.

Doctor? Sorry to bother you but this is Isabel, Andrew Macpherson's stepdaughter. First of all, I would like to thank you for the care you gave my Dad. He died very peacefully at home thanks to you. It meant a lot to all of us and we still miss him a lot. Oh, well life is like that isn't it?"

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of the time. She eats very little and the house is a mess. She just doesn't seem to care any more and that is not like her at all. When I talk about my kids, she occasionally brightens up but then she begins to cry. I have asked her to go and see you but she hasn't made an appointment. I finally called and made her an appointment to see you next week. I just wanted to fill you in. My brothers and I are very concerned."

"Thanks for filling me in, Isabel. Are you coming with her? I think that would be helpful."

Scenario 2 Teaching Tips

1. Distribute the case scenario. Allow participants a couple of minutes to read the information or ask one of the participants to read the scenario.
2. Ask what learning issues there are for participants. Have them written on the flipchart.
3. Identify case scenario issues as outlined above.

Scenario 2 Issues

1. Diagnosis and management of depression and atypical grief.
 2. Family support.
 3. Physician patient confidentiality
 4. Coping at home or some other alternative needs to be explored.
 5. Follow-up.
 6. Interdisciplinary approach.
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4. Ask participants how they would address each of these issues. What role is there – if any – for antidepressants/ anti-anxiety medications?
 5. If there is a role, what would you prescribe? For how long? How would you follow her?
 6. When would you refer her to a psychiatrist – if ever?
 7. What resources exist within the community to help with these issues?
 8. What resources need to be developed within their community and/or practice that will help their grieving patients? Who can they identify to lead these efforts?
 9. What role does physician-patient confidentiality play in this scenario? What would happen if Adrienne did not want to discuss how she was feeling/ coping? What would happen if Isabel refused to come into the office or if Adrienne refused to allow her to accompany her? How would you raise the topic?

Teaching Tip: Share your experiences in practice. What did you say? What would be a better way of raising the issue? If she refuses to discuss what can you do or say?

10. Can you use information provided by the daughter and not tell your patient where it came from? What information can /should you share with the family regarding your concerns re Adrienne? What would you say to Isabel regarding her concerns?

Teaching Tip: Share your experiences in practice. What did you say? What would be a better way of raising the issue? If she refuses to discuss what can you do or say?