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AUTHOR Eichenfield, Gregg A.; Audas, Millie
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ABSTRACT

The success of crisis intervention work with international students is highly dependent not only on the skill of the professional staff involved, but also the availability and use of other student services that may be provided to the International Student Services (ISS) Office. There are many cultural issues that must be considered when counseling international students beyond the basic trust, empathy, active listening skills and sensitivity that should be present in all cross-cultural, interpersonal interactions. Ongoing, supportive relationships must be established between ISS and mental health services (MHS). A positive, helpful relationship can be abused by ISS if every or too many students are referred to MHS. Instead, it is best to evaluate the problem to determine whether a referral is appropriate, find those staff who are most supportive and use them as primary interveners. Concerns of the terminally ill international students include personal and emotional preparation for death, adequacy of medical care, and providing physical and emotional comfort. Many cultural issues may arise when counseling the terminally ill student or the friends and family after death. These include religion and religious beliefs, concepts and assumptions about death and terminal illness, financial issues and insurance, and reluctance to seek psychological assistance. (Guidelines for responding to the death of an international student, or the death of an international student's loved one are provided.) (LLL)

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[Millie Audas]

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Gregg A. Eichenfield, Ph.D. University of Oklahoma

Crisis Management/Death and Dying: Coping with Terminal Illness in the International Student Community.

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The success of crisis intervention work with international students is highly dependent not only on the skill of the professional staff involved, but also the availability and use of other student services that may be provided to the International Student Services Office. It is important for international student advisors not only to feel comfortable with other professionals they may choose to involve in the crisis, but also to trust their clinical judgement, to view interventions with students or communities as collaborative efforts, and to believe that crises can be resolved in the best interest of the student without compromising the integrity of the institution. In summary: **Crisis intervention/management should be viewed as collaboration, not interference.**

There are many cultural issues that must be considered when counseling international students beyond the basic trust, empathy, active listening skills and sensitivity that should be present in all cross-cultural, interpersonal interactions. It is vital that the international student advisor and the mental health professional establish the needed congruence in their approach to intervention if one is to hope for successful resolution of critical situations; this collaborative effort is especially true in situations of terminal illness and the death of an international student.

In the intense, often stressful and fatiguing process of intervention, both parties--the international student advisor and the mental health worker--need understanding, mutual respect, assistance, and validation of each other. Building and maintaining these relationships, as well as effective intervention in death-related crises are the goals of this program.

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Establishing and Maintaining Relationships Between Mental Health Services and International Student Services.

If you are going to effectively intervene with international students, ongoing, supportive relationships must be established between International Student Services (ISS) and mental health services (MHS). These relationships can be facilitated by:

- Inviting staffs to meet together and establish relations
- ISS provide in-service training to MHS staff about differences with international students--in general and specific to particular groups of students
- ISS request training (or offered by MHS) in counseling

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skills or assertion, or other topics deemed helpful
Maintain contacts through consultation and participation
in other activities (e.g., MHS staff invited to ISS
events--dinners, awards banquets, etc.)

THESE RELATIONSHIPS TAKE TIME, EFFORT, AND HARD WORK. BUT THEY
DO PAY OFF IN TIMES OF CRISES.

"Crying Wolf"

A positive, helpful relationship can be abused by ISS if every or too many students are referred to MHS. Instead, evaluate the problem to determine whether a referral is appropriate:

Can the problem be resolved in the ISS office?

Does the student (or you) need time out to think?

Is the problem psychological in nature or cultural adjustment?

Not every situation is a crisis that needs to be handled now by MHS. Can I make an appointment with/for the student?

Because a student is demanding, must I respond now?

DO refer crises and those problems with acutely disturbed students

DO let MHS assist you in determining the nature of the problem and what assistance might be provided

Support vs Involvement

Don't expect MHS staff to be involved in all that ISS does. Some MHS staff may themselves feel uncomfortable around people of other cultures. Find those staff who are most supportive (in both offices) and use them as Primary Interveners. Support their knowledge and willingness to help, their work with you, and their efforts to increase knowledge and awareness of cultural differences with their respective staffs. Understand that your efforts will be supported, even without involvement from all staff in both offices.

THE CONCERNS OF THE TERMINALLY ILL INTERNATIONAL STUDENT

Individual/Personal Concerns

Personal/Emotional preparations for death

Adequacy of Medical Care (Student Health & other care)

Providing physical/emotional comfort

Possibility of hospice care

Personal counseling for student, family, support system

Intervention with these concerns

Trust your intuition/be open/show genuine concern

Feel positive, assertive about your position

You are "the family" away from the student's
own family; demonstrate that care/warmth
Listen to the student
Be sensitive to different personality traits:
shyness, overtness, driven, compulsive
Involve others--don't work with the student
alone--share the responsibilities
Encourage the student (in private) to seek help
Encourage assistance from friends/nationality grp
Expect the unexpected, prepare for the ambiguous;
and the student will appreciate these efforts

Cultural Concerns and Implications

Many cultural issues may arise when counseling the termi-
nally ill student or the friends/family after death,
beyond basic trust, empathy, listening skills, sensi-
tivity:

- Religion and religious beliefs
- Concepts and assumptions about death and terminal
illness
- Losing face
- Failure
- Financial issues, insurance
- Reluctance to seek psychological assistance

Involving Others

Choose MHS staff who will be helpful and supportive:
of the student, the situation and ISS staff
Communicate (with student's permission) with others
besides family/friends, who might be of help (e.g.,
academic advisors, faculty, RAs, Apt. Mgr, etc.)

Preparations for Death

Go over all issues with necessary people mentioned above
Begin checklist of people to inform
Prepare yourself, as well as others on your staff(s), for
emotional response
Seek help for yourself, as needed (talk to someone, exer-
cise to relieve tension, take time off)

Other Concerns

- Death certificates/medical records
- Insurance companies
- Informing students, staff, faculty of actual death
- Informing student's family, friends, embassy/consulate
- Disposition of the body

THE DEATH OF AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT

Contacting Significant Others

Phone calls/telex/letter/fax to family, relatives, etc
Contacting students, faculty, staff, administration

Legal Issues

Information released to media
Liability issues
Public statements
Differences between victims of accident/crime

Institutional Policies

Student Response to notification of the death
Friends/roommates/students from nationality group
Expect a variety of reactions (anger, sadness, depression, hyperactivity)
Backlash against System, Institution, You (as representative of the U.S.)
Share your own grief and allow students more time (e.g. let them linger in the office)

Staff Response

Your own response
Handling your own response--TALK!

ISS office staff

Be open
"Business as Usual", and yet time away from area, as necessary
Phone Calls to be routed for "official response"
Arranging for coverage during memorial service, and other related logistical concerns

MHS staff (if involved, and student known)

Student Services staff

Faculty/Staff from student's home department

Other Concerns (see above section)

THE DEATH OF AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT'S LOVED ONE

Contacting the student (if you receive the information first)
In person or by telephone

Legal Issues

Decisions about travel
Travel Arrangements
Visas/documents

Impact on other students

Academic/Institutional policies re: absence from campus, incompletes in courses, etc.

RELATED MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES FOR BOTH AREAS OF CONCERN

Collaborative Efforts--Joint work from beginning to end of crisis
Be sure and plan for follow-up with affected individuals,

groups, organizations

Grief Work

Resolution for self

Expect a variety of reactions

Provide intervention for affected staff, faculty, and students, beyond those who are directly involved, since grief reactions are varied, in kind, severity, and time period.

TITLE: Crisis Management / Death and Dying: Coping with terminal illness and the death of a student in the International Community.

Suggested Readings

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Audas/Eichenfield
The University of Oklahoma
10/88

**Guidelines in the event of the
death of an international student:**

The understanding of and respect for the differences in each culture are vital for the effective resolution of crisis concerning terminal illness and/or the death of an international student.

- o Look in student's file: Personal Data Sheet (completed upon arrival to school or at mandatory Orientation). Check country of origin, person(s) listed as close friend or relative in the U.S. Inform that person immediately.
- o Inform the Chief Student Personnel Officer and mental health professional in counseling services
- o Inform the representative/agent of Student Insurance company.
- o Take file to place of death, i.e., hospital, emergency ward. Will need information for various death certificate forms and to cross check information that hospital may have.
- o Meet with spouse, close friends, club president and decide manner in which parents will be informed. Sometimes one needs to use a cable, night-letter (through Western Union), most frequently through overseas call. Both cable and phone call should be made first to close relative/friend in the student's country if at all possible. It is important that someone close to the family be physically present to give news of death.
- o Advise--in phone call or cable-- that another call will follow a bit later to find out what would the family wish regarding body flown back to home nation, burial or funeral services locally, etc. Also they will be asked to inform us regarding what to do with belongings, checking/savings accounts, etc., left by student.
- o Advise all related student services of student's death: Housing, Food Services, Records, etc.
- o Advise Immigration and Naturalization Service office of student's death. Give full information on Personal Data Sheet.

- o Notice in student newspaper and town paper will announce death of student to faculty and community. If student has a host family in town, they should be advised through personal call or visit.
- o Call the nearest Consulate or Embassy and report the of student's death giving main statistics, re., major, town/city of origin, home address, etc. If possible request that a representative of the Consulate come to campus to attend the services and to meet with spouse or intimate friends.
- o Request that the university make full tuition/fees reimbursement for the semester during which student died. This should be communicated in writing to the Bursar's Office and the to student's family.
- o Send cable of condolence from International Office, request that Chief Student Personnel Officer President of the institution also send messages of condolence.
- o Meet with Funeral Director, spouse and/or close friends to decide details (type of service, casket, clothes for burial or shipment home, etc.) at earliest possible time.
- o Advise all concerned to seek counseling and establish on-going rapport with mental health professional until situation is accepted, until return to 'normalcy'. Person handling the situation (YOU) is encouraged to also seek assistance/support/encouragement of mental health professional. May wish to have mental health worker meet with student organization and/or close friends to begin or facilitate grief process (cultural considerations determine interventions).

In all of the above steps one can find the reassurance of doing the "right" thing by consulting psychologist and just as importantly by discussing all steps with president and members/friends of student's nationality club.

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**AREAS OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY TO WHICH STUDENT
DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS SHOULD BE SENSITIVE
CONCERNING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

Family structure
Important events in the life cycle
Roles of individual members
Rules of interpersonal interactions
Communication and linguistic rules
Rules of decorum and discipline
Religious beliefs
Standards for health and hygiene
Food preferences
Dress and personal appearance
History and traditions
Holidays and celebrations
Education and teaching methods
Perceptions of work and play
Perceptions of time and space
Explanations of natural phenomena
Attitudes towards pets and animals
Artistic and musical values and tastes
Life expectations and aspirations

SOME QUESTIONS TO HELP IDENTIFY CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS

Family Structure

Who is considered a member of the family?
What are the rights, roles, responsibilities of each person?

Interpersonal Relationships

How do people greet each other?
Who may disagree with whom?
How are insults expressed?

Decorum and Discipline

How do people behave at home, in public?
What means of discipline are used?
Who has authority over whom?

Food

What is eaten, in what order, how often?
What foods are favorites, taboo, typical?
What are the rules for table manners, offering foods, handling foods,
discarding foods?

Holidays and Celebrations

What holidays are observed, and what are their purposes?

Which holidays are important for children?

What cultural values are instilled in children during the holidays?

Values

What personal attributes are considered desirable?

What things (attributes) in the world are considered desirable? Undesirable?

Adapted from: Koslow, D.R. & Salett, E.P. (1989). Crossing Cultures in Mental Health.
SIETAR International, pp 18-20.