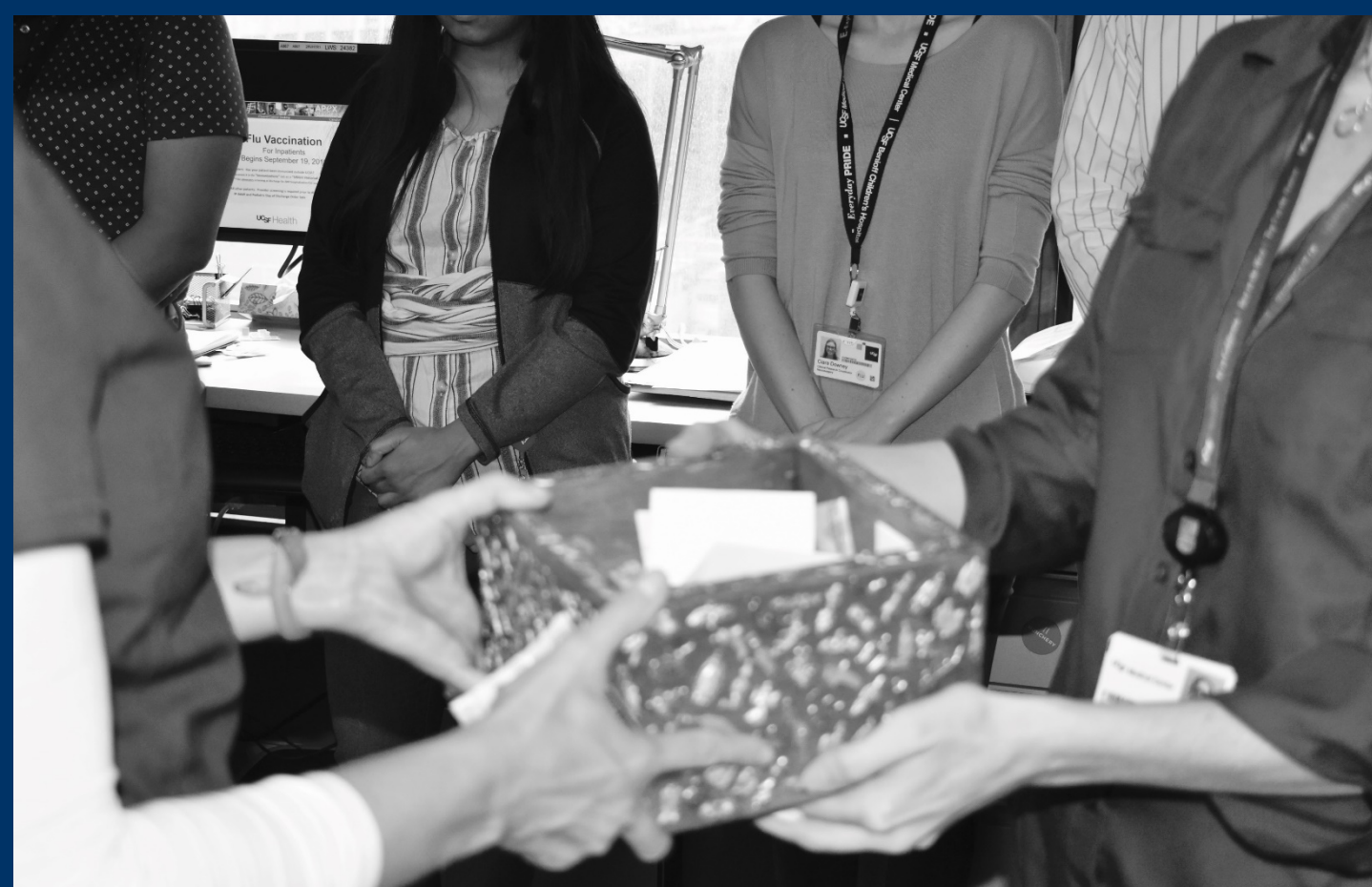
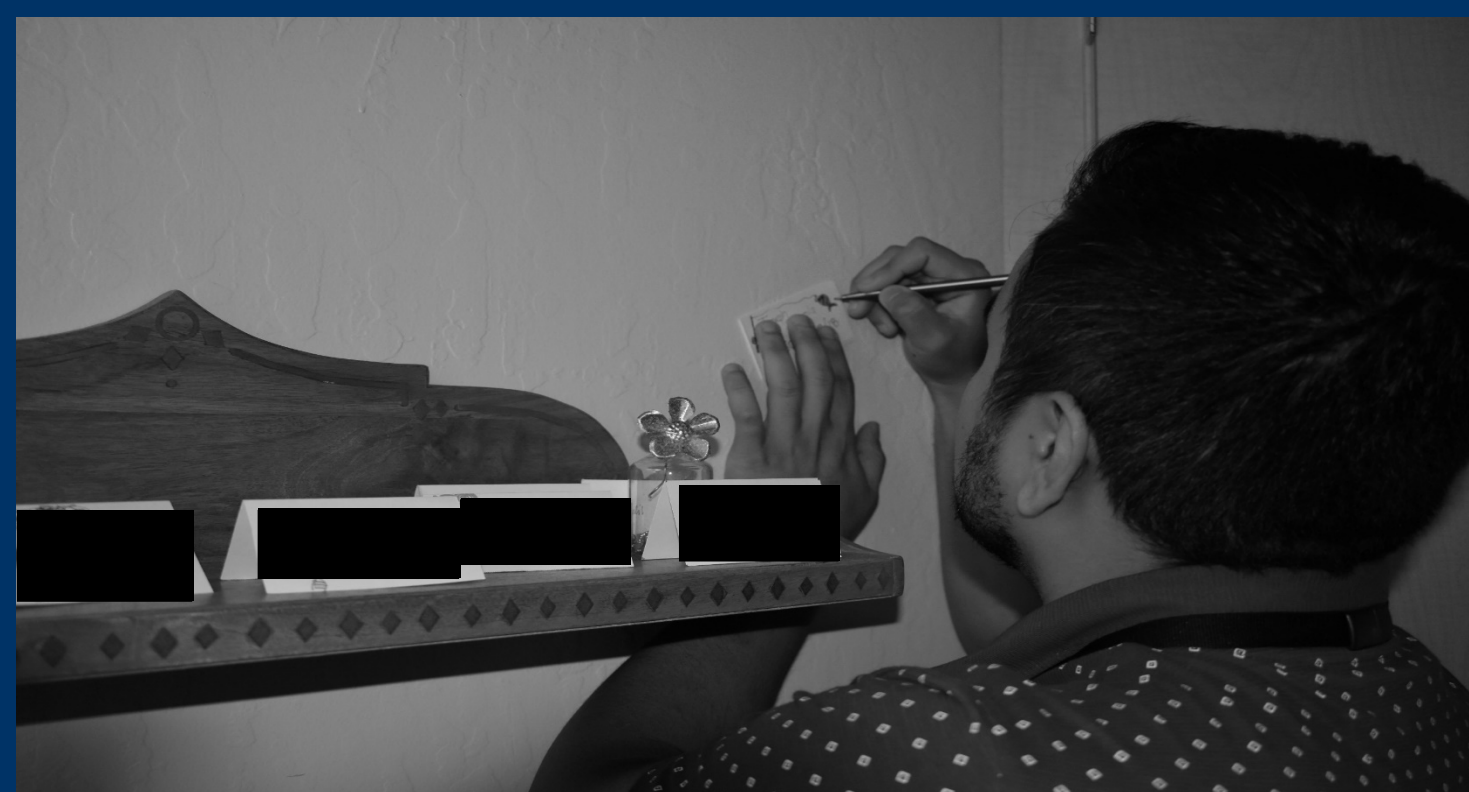


A Neuro-Oncology Team Addresses Grief

THE HONOR PROJECT

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INTRODUCTION

Neuro-oncology team members connect with patients through direct patient care, correspondence and the electronic medical record. Hence, relationships develop between patients and various team members. The prognosis for patients diagnosed with malignant gliomas remains grim. Consequently, team members have constant exposure to death. When a patient dies, team members experience loss but often have no formal opportunity to grieve. Patients die almost every week and grief is unavoidable in the workplace. Acknowledging what our team experiences on a regular basis became both an obligation and an opportunity to take action! The Honor Project was launched in September of 2017, setting in motion a cultural shift for our clinic.

METHODS

The Honor Project was designed as a meaning-centered team intervention addressing grief in the workplace, giving voice through ritual. It occurs during work hours and is fully supported by management. A specific, non-negotiable meeting time occurs monthly and all disciplines are invited. After nine months, a ten question survey utilizing the Qualtrics platform was delivered to participating neuro-oncology team members. They were asked to complete the survey based on their understanding and/or experiences of the Honor Project. Responses were analyzed to measure the efficacy and impact of the Honor Project.

RESULTS

The survey found that **100%** of team members answered somewhat or definitely to the following:

- Comfortable acknowledging my grief about patients' deaths
- Better able to cope with sadness related to patients' deaths
- Less alone in my own grief
- Closer to my colleagues
- A positive feeling about where I work
- A meaningful experience at work
- A greater sense of compassion towards my colleagues
- Makes a difference knowing management allows time during my workday to attend

The Ritual

When notified of a death, the team member is invited to pause and mindfully write the name of the patient on a card and place it on the "altar." The altar is a decorative shelf mounted in a staff-only area, in full view of all team members

The team gathers monthly to read the names aloud, sharing stories, memories, tears, laughter and a moment of silence for each person

The team is led in a meditation or silent contemplation of a poem or relevant passage

Chocolate is offered "to ease the bitterness of death and remind us of the sweetness of life"

The team listens to a closing song and the ritual ends with a group hug

A card is mailed to families of patients that are honored each month

Twice a year at the Spring and Fall Equinox the team is invited to gather at a local beach to release the names of the deceased into the fire and share songs and libations



May I be happy

May I be at peace

May I be free from suffering

May our patients and loved ones be happy

May our patients and loved ones be at peace

May our patients and loved ones be free from suffering

May we offer each other kindness and compassion as we work together

DISCUSSION

The Honor Project identifies and acknowledges work-related grief. In doing so, grief in the workplace is validated and normalized, promoting bereavement as a natural healing process.

The Honor Project helps team members honor their own personal feelings of loss, and brings awareness and literal shoulder to shoulder team support, enhancing individual coping.

The Honor Project provides a meaning-centered team intervention and fosters understanding, respect and compassion among colleagues, cultivating a supportive work community.

The Honor Project communicates to the team that management understands the significant emotional challenges of the work and honors their experiences of grief.

CONCLUSION

"We burn out, not because we don't care, but because we don't grieve...because we have allowed our hearts to become so filled with loss that we have no room left to care."

- Rachel Naomi Remen, MD

- The Honor Project is a tangible way to honor deceased patients, as well as the team members who have served them.

- The Honor Project is a cost-effective workplace intervention to address the occupational hazard of experiencing ongoing loss and grief by team members in a neuro-oncology clinic.

- The Honor Project is a protective factor, building team resiliency and supporting job satisfaction and productivity.

- The Honor Project is one aspect of the relentless, radical self-care that is necessary to sustain a career in neuro-oncology.

Chocolate generously donated by



In loving memory of Bernice Rossi

