

At least we can send some flowers...

Carlo Alfredo Clerici^{1,2,3}, Andrea Ferrari¹, Laura Veneroni^{1,2}, Giovanna Casiraghi¹, Barbara Giacon¹, Mariangela Armiraglio¹, and Maura Massimino¹

¹Pediatric Oncology Unit, Fondazione IRCCS Istituto Nazionale Tumori, Milan; ²Psychology Section, Department of Biomolecular Sciences and Biotechnologies, Faculty of Medicine, University of Milan, Milan; ³SSD Psicologia Clinica, Fondazione IRCCS Istituto Nazionale Tumori, Milan, Italy

ABSTRACT

Aims and background. Cancer may demand lengthy treatment and the emotional attachment between care providers and the patient may become intense, especially when the latter is a child. If patients die, their families and the care-providing staff need help to cope with the loss.

Short communication. We describe a procedure in use at the Istituto Nazionale Tumori in Milan for taking leave of families whose children die. This practice is based on simply sending flowers to families who have lost their child, and was started after an emotionally very demanding case.

Conclusion. Our sending flowers with a handwritten condolence letter is a simple gesture that seems to have helped both the patients' families and the members of our care-providing team in the process of mourning.

Key words: grief, bereavement, psychological support, psychology, pediatric oncology, condolence letter.

Acknowledgments: The authors wish to thank the Bianca Garavaglia Association for financially sustaining the pediatric psychological support service provided at the Pediatric Oncology Unit of the Istituto Nazionale Tumori in Milan.

Correspondence to: Dr Carlo Alfredo Clerici, Pediatric Oncology Unit, Fondazione IRCCS Istituto Nazionale Tumori, Via G Venezian 1, 20133 Milan, Italy.
Tel +39-02-23902588;
fax +39-02-23902648;
email carlo.clerici@unimi.it

Received July 19, 2011;
accepted January 31, 2012.