

Nursing in Mortuary and Bereavement

Barbara Peters, Mortuary practitioner

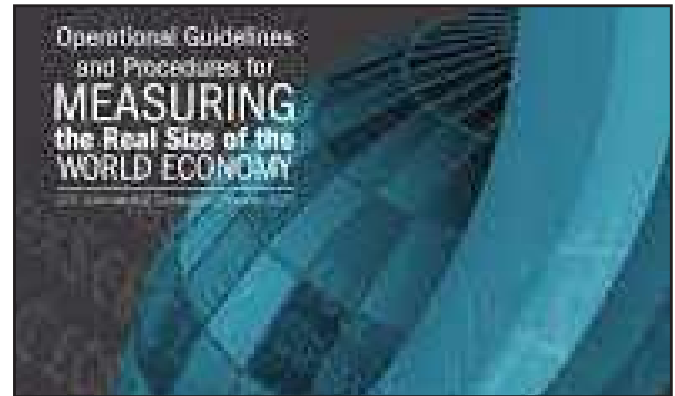
TV & Film advisor and supporting artist looking for new challenges, United Kingdom

Abstract:

Barbara Peters has been a Mortuary and Bereavement Services Manager for a number of NHS Trust's throughout the UK. She is also a fully qualified Anatomical Pathology Technologist which has enabled her to assist many Home Office Pathologists and Consultant Pathologists conducting forensic postmortems dealing with a variety of both high profile and routine cases. A mortuary or morgue is a place of mystery, sadness, grief or repulsion and we all hope, while we are alive, we will never need to visit. For families who have lost a loved one to a death whether it's sudden or unexpected, this becomes a reality.

Working in a mortuary is an extremely worthwhile profession which is so misunderstood by society. Even now with changes in attitudes towards death and dying, most people do not realise what is involved for caring for someone's loved one after death and to maintain their respect and dignity for that person, as well as any last wishes from the family. My career has spanned for nearly 20 years in the mortuary environment and like to think what I have done brings the warmth into what people think is a cold place. We have seen people at their most vulnerable, in the grips of the rawest stages of grief and it's the job to provide compassionate, useful support right at the beginning of the journey through bereavement for all cultures and faiths. When someone dies in the hospital or in the community, there is support for families through the emotional turbulence they endure following their loved one's death. Bereavement Officers are also there to help with the immense amount of paperwork involved, helping families through the process of registering a death.

You can get some people who are hysterical almost to the point that they're numb. Some people collapse. Others are quite relieved if their loved one was ill for a long time and they're now at peace. There's also guilt, especially with elderly family, if they haven't seen them for a while.



I've also seen people in total denial. They believe that it is not their loved one. They say, 'He's got a birthmark. I want evidence that it's really him.' And you must take all the covers off to show them. I've seen quite a variety of emotions.

Biography:

I was employed as a Mortuary Services Manager for multi-site mortuaries around the UK. I also have worked in a number of mortuaries as a locum throughout the UK.

My role involved working directly with the public, having good communication and listening skills which are vital to the smooth running of the department and the seamless transition between the mortuary, bereavement services, and the general public. This also includes learning and development of end of life care and care of the deceased patient to all clinical staff within the Trust, as well as outside agencies such as the Police, ambulance and funeral directors. From this, I have achieved vast improvements in these areas, which have been positively received from relatives of patients as well as clinical/nursing teams. I have also been the person designate for the Mortuary Services for the HTA and also experienced in quality management, health and safety and emergency planning in this area. This also includes disaster mortuary management with dealing with high profile individuals.

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