

Tiny Trunks, Heavy Hearts: Symbolizing Pregnancy Loss Through Elephants

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Background

Pregnancy loss, affecting 1 in 4 pregnancies, is very personal and often overlooked in the clinical setting. At Cleveland Clinic Beachwood ASC, our patients receive a sympathy card and elephant keychain to show our support. While impact is difficult to measure due to its sensitive nature, patient feedback has shown that our support matters. Acknowledging grief helps validate emotions, foster healing, and supports trauma informed care.

Objectives Of The Project

The goal of this project is to acknowledge pregnancy loss and its significance that is deserving of emotional and psychological support. Research has consistently shown that the psychological impact of miscarriage, medical termination, and abortion is frequently minimized in perinatal and reproductive settings. To support patients, it is essential that we recognize the emotional toll of these experiences and integrate compassionate, trauma-informed approaches into our standard of practice.



Process of Implementation

Recognizing the emotional impact of pregnancy loss, the nursing staff implemented emotional support into patient care plans. We support our patients by providing them with a sympathy card signed by the care team as well as an elephant keychain in a white meslin bag with a supportive note. These items are provided to the patient in PACU with no immediate obligation to open them at that time.



Statement Of Success Practice

After a year of implementing the use of a sympathy card and elephant keychain into our practice, we have seen positive outcomes for both the patients and our staff. We have had patients or their significant others express their appreciation and gratitude, with one patient returning to replace a lost one due to how much it meant to them. A survey was completed which revealed that the majority of the staff felt this patient population was challenging to care for due to its sensitive nature. Another survey question revealed that about half of the nursing staff felt more emotionally prepared to care for this population using this tool.

References

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Taylor, L. (2024). A lesson from the elephants. *Grief and Loss Center*. <https://mygriefandloss.org/lauriesblog/2024/2/12/a-lesson-from-the-elephants>

Implications For Advancing The Practice

Research proves that pregnancy loss is often overlooked and we are working to change that by validating our patients feelings with the use of an elephant keychain. Symbolism can be a powerful tool during the healing and emotional recovery of a pregnancy loss. Backed by leadership, our intervention is being shared across OR infinity meetings at Cleveland Clinic to inspire broader change amongst the enterprise.

EVERY BABY LOSS MATTERS

Employee Survey

How emotionally challenging is it for you to take care of loss patients?

