

Hospice of the North Shore reaches out to employers

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Hospice of the North Shore has always prided itself on providing compassionate care for not only the patient but the entire family as well.

Now that family has expanded into the workplace and includes the employer. HNS has been chosen to partner with Caring Connections workplace outreach initiative. Under the auspices of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, the initiative is called, "It's About How You Live — At Work."

Nancy Sherman, a licensed social worker, is the director of Bereavement Services for Hospice of the North Shore.

"We are honored to be chosen as one of 35 hospice partners across the country," Sherman said. "We will be actively reaching out to employers throughout the North Shore over the next year."

Sherman said that HNS has actually been running a program known as Grief at Work for quite some time. Services are provided during illness, care giving and grief.

"All of those things have tremendous impact on the workplace," said Sherman noting they can all be distracting for the employee. "Many employers haven't recognized that fact. If they understood it better, they could be proactive. It would help them be a better employer," and they would earn the gratitude of the employee, Sherman said.

"The odds are that someone is always going through something," Sherman noted. But, for some people, who never thought it could happen to them, it's quite a shock and they have difficulty coping. The other problem that crops up is care giving for an ill family member (including a parent, spouse, sibling or child).

Sherman noted that according to a 2006 study conducted through the National Alliance for Caregiving and MetLife, United States businesses lose approximately \$17.1 billion to \$33.6 billion per year in productivity for full-time employees with care giving responsibilities.

Sherman ran through some pretty impressive statistics to illustrate some of the grief issues and the related fallout.

“Grief,” Sherman said, “isn’t limited to death of a loved one.” Employees may be affected by the loss of a pet, a divorce, a house fire or robbery or a family crisis. And it can be expensive in time, energy and finances.

Sherman referred to a 2003 report called “The Grief Index: The Hidden Annual Cost of Grief in America’s workplace.”

The report states:

- Illnesses or deaths in the family are the second most common problems affecting workplace performance.
- Ninety percent of those in physical jobs indicate a much higher incidence of physical injuries due to reduced concentration in the weeks or months following a major loss.
- Seventy percent of grieving people surveyed report increased or new use of alcohol or mind-altering substances up to six months following a major loss.
- Ninety percent of grieving people surveyed report that their ability to concentrate is reduced following a loss.”

HNS, through its new partnership, can come to the workplace to share ideas and dialogue with employers, employees or both. Counseling is also available by phone and HNS trained personnel can also provide resources and support for anyone directly or indirectly affected by an employee’s crisis. In fact, through Caring Connections, hospice can provide as much direct or indirect support as the employer wishes.

“We can also talk about advance directives,” Sherman said, who said it’s important to know about health-care proxies, living wills and other things that can come up.

“There is no cost for this,” Sherman said. “It’s costly for the organization but it’s the right thing to do. It makes the community better and the employees better. It’s helping others. We touch people in a whole lot of different ways. And anyone is eligible to call us.”

Sherman said Hospice of the North Shore services 45 cities and towns and sees an average of 260 to 270 patients at any given time. Now the organization hopes to provide guidance for employees who have serious problems, and their colleagues and employers who are concerned about them.

“I’m excited,” Sherman said. “I’m pretty passionate about this. I think it’s important for employers to recognize the impact that not taking care of these things can have on them. We want to help them be the best employers they can be. Doesn’t everyone want that?”

To learn more about resources for employers, contact Nancy Sherman at 978-750-9311 or njsherman@hns.org.

