

Pain - Communication and the Patient Experience

Emotional Pain

In his apartment, and leaving

[The item that the man cuts out of the newspaper is an obituary, a death announcement. It is his friend's obituary.]

Mr. Nesbitt:
Sorry...

Neighbour:
Excuse me.

Mr. Nesbitt:
Sorry, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. Oh - your keys. Oh, I'll get them for you.

Neighbour:
It's okay. I got it.

Mr. Nesbitt:
Have a good day.

Sitting on the bench

Mr. Nesbitt:
Hello.

Woman:
Hi.

Mr. Nesbitt:
It feels like rain, huh.

Woman:
Mmm hmm. Hey!

Friend:
Oh my God, I haven't seen you in so long!

Woman:
I know! It's been so long!

Friend:
Alright! Single lattes, right?

Woman:
Yeah sure! Let's go.

At the corner store

Mr. Nesbitt:
Hi Barbara.

Grandson:
I'm telling you, I can't find it!

Barbara:
Did you look on the second shelf? At the back.

Grandson:
Yes - I know, I'm at the second shelf already.

Barbara:
Are you on the ladder?

Grandson:
Yes I'm on the ladder!

Barbara:
I'm training my grandson. I have to go take care of this. You can leave your money on the counter.

Mr. Nesbitt:
Okay.

Back in his apartment

Superintendent:
There. Just like that! How's that?

Mr. Nesbitt:
That's good.

Superintendent:
Anything else you need me to do for you today Mr. Nesbitt?

Mr. Nesbitt:
No thanks.

Superintendent:
Hey, I haven't seen your friend around in a little while. Is everything okay?

Mr. Nesbitt:
He passed away a few days ago. He was my last friend.

Superintendent:
I'm sorry to hear that.

Mr. Nesbitt:
What are you gonna do. He was a good guy.

Superintendent:
Yeah. He seemed like it.

Mr. Nesbitt:
Yeah.

Superintendent:
I didn't really know him. What was he like?

Dr. Don Melady:
Some of my best friends are old. In fact most of my best friends are old, in their eighties and nineties. And one of the things that is a real theme in their lives is the amount of loss that they experience. And I think that's something that we don't think about very often. It's something my parents talked about and my close friends talk about as well, that they are surviving, and everybody whom they've spent their whole lives with are slowly, they're losing them, they are sort of mostly dying. So, you know, one close friend - he's 95 now - every member of his graduating class and every member of his work cohort has now died. And he's okay with that; he can't reverse it and he knows that that's one of the costs of living to be 95, but it still is - it's

a painful experience for him, and, you know, with that loss goes a loss of part of your own life, because you're losing the ability to talk over, you know, "remember when" because there's nobody else who remembers those things. And it can, as we go through life, it is less likely that we develop new social circles and very few people are really good at developing new social contacts as they - well, some people aren't very good at developing social contacts at any age but - so it becomes harder. So I think there is a certain isolation that comes with that loss which is really just a part of living that long. There's an existential pain, I guess, also, that if you like living there is a growing awareness that pretty soon or some time you're going to lose that thing that you like, which is life. And that's, I think, on the periphery of everybody's thoughts as they get older as well.

Dr. Kerry Bowman:

As people age, for physical reasons, and sometimes economic - and sometimes they've lost a lot of people as well within their own age group - their world can shrink, and there can be a kind of an isolation that comes along. And so often, you know, you want to compensate for that by making social contact as available to older people as you possibly can, but there is many older people that is very positive in their outlook. I also find that there's this ridiculous notion of one-size-fits-all with older people. Everyone needs to socialize, and everyone needs to love it, and people at earlier stages in their adult life had no interest in doing things in large groups, or being on bus tours, or any of the - or playing bingo - or you know. And what happens - and I find it very simplistic - is that when a person is over 80 there's an assumption that they're going to love all these things. They're the same person, and there's a lot of personality differences, and people relate to the world in very different ways, and I think this is almost disrespectful to older people to make an assumption that all group activities are a wonderful thing at all times. They're the same person they were, you know, years earlier, and if they didn't love socializing in large groups then they may not love it at 80 either. So you've got to be careful about that.