

# THE REFERRAL

SHARED KNOWLEDGE FOR BETTER PATIENT OUTCOMES



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REFER EARLY. BETTER OUTCOMES.

## Sharpening your Grief Literacy is clinical imperative

### Sharpening your Grief Literacy is clinical imperative

Healthcare providers influence far more than medical outcomes. You shape how families face uncertainty, navigate loss, and recover afterward. Grief often begins at diagnosis, long before end of life. When we recognize and respond early, we transform the entire care experience.

### Why Grief Literacy Matters in Clinical Care

Grief is not only an emotional issue. It affects treatment adherence, caregiver resilience, and the likelihood of acute medical crises. Yet grief remains one of the least addressed components of serious illness care. Many clinicians report limited confidence in identifying when grief requires additional support or referral.

A population-based study found that most bereaved people rely heavily on family and community support. **Professional intervention is most helpful when targeted to individuals with higher risk factors or complicated grief responses.** Providers who understand these patterns can deliver more effective, timely care.<sup>1</sup>

### GRIEF LITERACY MEANS:

- Spotting anticipatory grief early
- Reducing caregiver isolation
- Knowing when to bring in specialized grief support
- Validating emotional needs as part of clinical care

This strengthens trust, decision-making, and quality of life. It also lowers the likelihood of preventable distress during and after a patient's death.

***Your referral can be the first moment a family feels safe enough to grieve.***

Early hospice referrals help families build supportive relationships with the care team when they are still able to participate fully. That foundation leads to better transitions into bereavement. Families feel seen, informed, and supported. They are not left alone with shock or confusion. Your referral can be the moment a family feels permission to seek help.

[ONLINE CLINICAL REFERRAL FORM](#)

## A PROVEN PATHWAY: HOSPICE OF THE CHESAPEAKE'S APPROACH



### Winter Grief Support

Chesapeake Life Center, the bereavement services arm of Hospice of the Chesapeake, offers grief support throughout the illness journey. Year-round workshops and support groups are designed for adults, teens, and children. Families receive compassionate spaces to process emotions, strengthen coping skills, and maintain social connection.

#### Programs include:

- Creative art therapy
- Nature-based grief healing
- Youth and family support
- Drop-in and virtual groups for accessibility



This model reflects the Compassionate Communities approach supported by research: grief is best eased through community relationships supported by targeted professional care.<sup>1</sup>

### Your Role: Champion Earlier Support

You are often the first to notice when a caregiver is overwhelmed or when anticipatory grief is taking hold. Acting early protects longterm wellbeing. It also reinforces that families are not alone.

***Grief literacy is essential clinical care. Begin the conversation sooner. Refer before the crisis. Help families rebuild strength for what comes next.***

<sup>1</sup>Aoun et al., 2018: targeted support improves outcomes when aligned with risk factors.

## CLINICIAN CHECKLIST: WHEN TO INITIATE A GRIEF-INFORMED REFERRAL

### Refer early when you observe:

- Increased caregiver strain or exhaustion
- Anxiety, panic, or difficulty coping with decision-making
- Isolation or withdrawal from family and community
- Guilt, anger, or anticipatory grief affecting daily functioning
- Difficulty accepting illness progression or prognosis
- Youth or teens struggling with changes in the home
- Loss of employment or role-identity due to caregiving
- Sudden changes in routine medical engagement



**Fax Referrals to: 443-837-3387**

**ONLINE CLINICAL REFERRAL FORM**