

## **The role of Recreation Therapists in Care Centres during the COVID 19 out break and the grief impact on staff.**

The following article is an excerpt from a comprehensive article. This reference in this article highlights the role and impact of grief on Recreation Therapist at the one care centre.

Stolte, Elise, Cracks to Chasms: How and why tragedy hit Alberta's long-term care homes. Edmonton Journal, April 25, 2021.



Benevolence Care Centre recreation therapist Kateline Hladky helped create a memory wall of residents who died during a recent COVID-19 outbreak, which included personal items staff packed up in their rooms. Here Hladky holds a collector train that belonged to Brian Vollrath. PHOTO BY ED KAISER /Postmedia

The Leadership Team created a memory wall of residents that past away during COVID which included some of their personal items, to remember them at the Benevolence Care Centre in Edmonton, April 15, 2021. PHOTO BY ED KAISER /Postmedia

## **Recovery: the science and the grief**

**The impact on the health care team** - A COVID-19 outbreak in a long-term care home is a classic case of the type of stress that's most harmful to the human brain. It's unpredictable, prolonged and urgent. The human brain is resilient, but few people can easily bounce back from that combination. It puts the nervous system in overdrive, which floods the body with stress hormones and interrupts sleep and mood regulation.

"Your survival brain is putting out a lot of chemicals," said Carole Marriott, whose job it is to keep as many of CapitalCare's front-line workers as healthy as possible.

For many people, that's what the next phase of recovering from COVID-19 needs to focus on: mental health. Facility operators are trying to pull back, grieve the many losses, remember and take care of their staff. They're setting up memorial walls, talking about the trauma.

Marriott was at Lynnwood during the outbreak, the public facility where 62 residents died. They're planting a tree in the atrium in honour of those lost, and creating a memory wall on wheels to move between floors since staff and residents are still not allowed out of their smaller cohorts.

The grief people feel is complex. Part of it is linked to something researchers call "moral injury," which is stress arising from inner conflict, such when staff were required to police families even when they saw the damage isolation was doing to residents. It was also the sheer number of people dying, and how they died.

"Normally, you're not dealing with seven or eight deaths in one day. And they died alone. (Staff) were just devastated that these people had nobody there at the end of their lives," said Rhea Coughlan, a health care aide and chair of Local 049 with AUPE.

"I'd come home crying," said Kateline Hladky, a recreation therapist at Benevolence. "One of the thank-you cards inside (the lobby) is from a family where I did three end-of-life Zoom calls in a day so they could all say good-bye to their loved one without coming in."

"It wasn't easy, that's for sure. But the summer, the warm weather, being allowed to garden with our residents and having them come out of their rooms again," she said. "It's finally lifting."