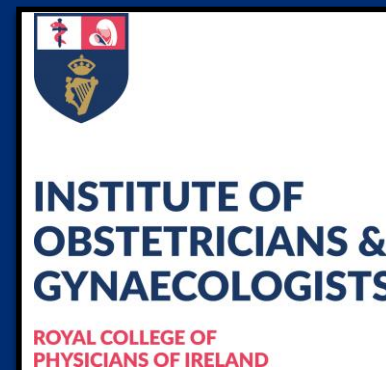


Empathy in training: Applied Drama and Communicating Bereavement in the Maternity Services

Aisling Smith

7 February 2019



The Beginning of this Project

Minister Leo Varadkar: I'm "ashamed" at how mums who lost babies were treated ...

HSE Midland Regional Hospital, Portlaoise
Perinatal Deaths (2006-date)

Report to the Minister for Health

Dr James Reilly TD

From

Dr Tony Holohan
Chief Medical Officer

24 February 2014



Burnout: Our doctors have it, so what is the prescription?

Wellbeing of frontline staff 'should be a top priority for hospital managers, policy makers and the health services'

The Beginning of this Project

49,904 Births in 2015

○ 488 Perinatal Deaths

- 60% Stillbirth (294)
 - Congenital Malformation
 - Placental Dysfunction
 - Unexplained

Perinatal Mortality Rate 4.3/1,000*

* Corrected with exclusion of congenital malformation

National Perinatal
Epidemiology
Centre



When things go wrong, everyone focuses on clinical decisions and performance. Inadequate resources, even when they are identified, are less newsworthy. Many clinicians feel they are only one step away from the High Court where decisions, often taken in the middle of the night in a crisis, are dissected and parsed in slow motion by senior counsels and highly paid professional experts enjoying the benefit of a night's sleep.

To see colleagues who have struggled hard unfairly pilloried without the right of redress – because of confidentiality rules – demoralises everyone. No wonder recruitment and retention is such a problem.

Prof Chris Fitzpatrick
Via The Irish Times

Developing the training



Steering group
established with Clinical
Lead, representatives
from two patient groups,
RCPI and the Abbey

Identified trainees in their
2nd to 5th year of working
as a registrar to be the
optimum group to train

- Increase a sense of support among patients
- Give coping skills to the trainees
- We wanted to help them maintain a sense of authenticity while doing the same thing over and over again
- Help trainees manage the balance of professionalism and developing a positive patient relationship

We set up interviews...



Interviews

- **3 Days**
- **45 minute interviews**
- **16 Volunteers**
- **14 Interviews completed**
 - **6 Clinicians**
 - **2 Couples**
 - **1 Father**
 - **7 Mothers**
- **Brid Shine, Clinical Midwife Specialist, Bereavement and Loss, Coombe Women & Infants University Hospital, Dublin, Ireland**



“The Bereavement Project”

became

“The Empathy Project”



Empathy, compassion and emotion contagion

“Empathy is a social and emotional skill that helps you to feel and understand the emotions, circumstances, intentions, thoughts and needs of others, such that you can offer sensitive, perceptive and appropriate communication and support”

Karla McKlaren, The Art of Empathy

compassion



NOUN

[mass noun]

Sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others.

‘the victims should be treated with compassion’

+ More example sentences

+ Synonyms

<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/compassion>

empathy



NOUN

[mass noun]

The ability to understand and share the feelings of another.

+ Example sentences

+ Synonyms

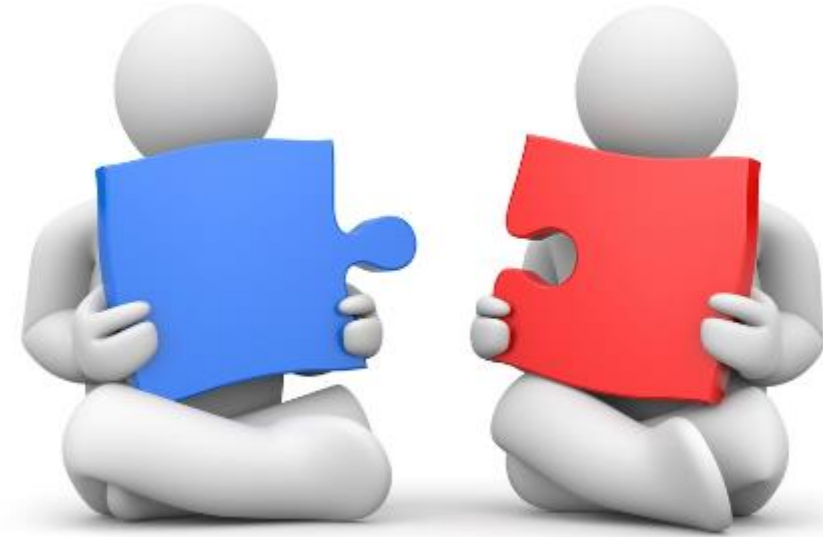
When does empathy start?



Our learning outcomes

- demonstrate a sense of presence when breaking bad news
- connect with parents who have experienced stillbirth
- explore their own emotional responses to better respond to grieving parents
- choose language, stance and gesture appropriate to the situation
- demonstrate an increased awareness of how you say what you say to parents who have experienced stillbirth
- actively listen and appropriately respond to communicate compassionately with parents
- build rigour and resilience to keep caring with each new encounter
- reconcile being authentic and caring repeatedly

The Workshops



Facilitated by the Abbey

January to May 2018

44 Trainees attended

Pre and post workshop
evaluation

Follow up interviews

Some key themes from interview:

**Clarity of language, equal
stance, space to react**

**“I had the courage to say
I can’t find a heart beat”**

The Workshops

Tableaux creation

Thought shadowing where you make a freeze frame of a moment in a therapeutic encounter and then have the participants voice the thoughts and feelings going through the participants heads

Movement work

with added mindfulness to tease out the layers of communication in the doctor/patient relationship

Scene creations

creating short scenes whose theatricality is emphasised using various prompts which add a layer of artificiality so that the form enhances the emotional content

Rigour and repetition

Recreating the rehearsal room to create an objectivity about difficult content while building the resilience to keep 'meeting' that content emotionally

Perspective taking

Contemplating quotations from actual patients to explore empathy, the same way an actor would approach a text

Next Steps

- Completion of qualitative research
- A Play

Acknowledgements

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- Féileacáin, Marie Creegan and all of the parents who shared their stories



INSTITUTE OF
OBSTETRICIANS &
GYNAECOLOGISTS

ROYAL COLLEGE OF
PHYSICIANS OF IRELAND

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Féileacáin

Stillbirth and Neonatal Death
Association of Ireland
(SANDAI)