

# TO YOUR HEALTH

Carleton-Willard Village Out-Patient Clinic - 100 Old Billerica Rd., Bedford, MA 01730

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## Respect Your Grief

By Judi Tabor, MSW, LCSW

In the past few months, the Carleton-Willard community has been reeling with the loss of several members of its family. The number of resident deaths in such a short period has been unprecedented here. As we try to understand and reconcile these many losses in our lives, our hearts are heavy with grief.

The grief journey is a highly personal, unique experience for each of us. In their article **Coping with Grief and Loss**, authors Jeanne Segal, Ph.D. and Melinda Smith, M.A. state, "how you grieve depends on many factors, including your personality and coping style, your life experience, your faith, and the nature of the loss." Some deaths might be expected, while others come suddenly, leaving us in shock and disbelief.

The nature of the many losses recently in our Carleton Willard family have varied, which affects our grief responses, as well as highlighting our own mortality. In his book **Understanding Your Grief**, Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D. states "Sometimes we cannot understand the death of someone we've held dear. I have found that sometimes it is in staying open to the mystery and recognizing that we don't understand and can't control everything that surrounds us, that understanding eventually comes. In fact, perhaps it is 'standing under' the mysterious experience of death that provides us with a unique perspective.

*We are not above or bigger than death.*



Maybe only after exhausting the search for understanding why someone we love has died can we discover a newly defined 'why' for our own life."

Grief itself is difficult to ignore; it has a way of knocking at your door. Grief needs to be worked through. You don't "get over" loss in your life; instead, you reconcile the loss by working through all the emotions that loss has stirred up in you. According to Dr. Wolfelt, "Perhaps the most important truth I have learned is that healing in grief is heart-based, not head-based. The centerpiece of the integration of grief is not the mind, but the heart."

It goes without saying that losing someone you care about is very painful, and grief is a very natural response to that loss. Unfortunately, society has had a long history of making us feel uneasy about our feelings and expression of grief. In his book **A Grief Observed**, C.S. Lewis wrote of his experience after the death of his wife. He said, "An odd by-product of my loss is that I'm aware of being an embarrassment to everyone I meet...perhaps the bereaved ought to be isolated in special settlements like lepers." You may be stunned by those words, but Lewis goes on to explain, "society often tends to make those of us in grief feel shame and embarrassment about our feelings of grief." Dr. Wolfelt continues, "If you are perceived as 'doing well' with your grief, you are considered 'strong' and 'in control'. If your feelings are fairly intense, you may be labeled as 'overly emotional, needy and not doing well.'"

The problem with these societal messages is that they do a disservice to the bereaved individual, placing an “expectation” on their journey that ought not be there. In her last book before her death in 2004, psychiatrist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross commented on the five stages of grief she introduced in 1969:

“They were never meant to help tuck messy emotions into neat packages. They are responses to loss that many people have, but **there is not a typical response to loss, as there is no typical loss.** Our grieving is as individual as our lives.”

So how do we reconcile the losses of so many we’ve held dear as part of our CWV family? Just by setting our intention to heal and acknowledge our grief, we are honoring the person we’ve lost as well as our own journey. Authors Segal and Smith continue, stating “an important factor in healing from loss is having the support of other people. Sharing your loss makes the burden of grief easier to carry.” They recommend:

- Turn to friends and family members
- Draw comfort from your faith
- Join a support group
- Talk to a therapist or grief counselor
- Express your feelings in a tangible or creative way
- Write about your grief journey in a journal
- Look after your physical health

Reconciling loss in your life doesn’t happen overnight. It takes time to work through grief. Don’t let anyone tell you how to feel, and don’t tell yourself how to feel either. Drop the “shoulds and oughts”. Allow yourself to feel whatever you feel without embarrassment or judgment. Respect your grief, and allow it to unfold in ways that feel right to you.



## Health Education Lecture

Dr. Robert Stern will be speaking on the topic of Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE). Dr. Stern is the director of the Boston University Alzheimer's Disease Center and CTE Center. CTE is a topic we hear about regularly in the news and this talk promises to be informative with the most up-to-date information.

Please join us on

**Wednesday, October 11, 2017**

**10:30 am - 11:30 am**

**Auditorium Center**

## FLU VACCINE CLINICS for Cluster Home, Badger and Winthrop Terrace Residents will be

**Friday, October 13th**

**9:00 am - 11:30 am**

**Auditorium Left**

**Wednesday, October 18th**

**1:30 pm - 4:00 pm**

**Auditorium Center**

## Comings and Goings

We are sad to say goodbye to Heidi Doreau, one of our Saturday nurse practitioners. After five years at CWV she has returned to school to work on her doctorate degree. Heidi is still working with Dr. Hanjura’s practice in Bedford but will no longer be coming to CWV. We wish Heidi the best as she moves forward in her career.

We are happy to announce a new NP has been hired. Pam Duchene comes to us with 13 years of geriatric experience. She will be working two Saturdays per month and filling in from time to time when Susan Cusson is on vacation.

Another new face in the Clinic is Renata Vieira, she will be covering the reception desk in the Clinic on some Saturdays.

**Welcome Pam and Renata!**