

CMP PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

Civil Money Penalty Reinvestment Program

Helping Nursing Home Communities Cope with Grief

In 2017, Dr. Toni Miles, Professor of Epidemiology at the University of Georgia, along with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) leadership in Georgia (Region IV), implemented a project called, **“Changing the Culture of Death and Dying in the Nursing Home Setting.”** The purpose of the project was to provide a new tool, “Best Practices in Bereavement Care.”

“Grief and loss are an emerging public health problem,” Dr. Miles said. “We believe that nursing homes can teach us how to diminish the negative health effects associated with grief by hearing from persons who care for others.”

Project Details

Focus: Culture change / quality improvement

Project Funding: \$176,032

Project Duration: 2016-17

Funded Entity: University of Georgia School of Public Health

About the Best Practices in Bereavement Care Tool

“Best Practices in Bereavement Care” consists of two booklet-style guides designed for (1) residents and family members, and (2) staff. These guides include testimonials and best practices for handling bereavement that were gleaned from more than 60 hours of recorded interviews with staff, residents, and family members, in several areas related to coping with death:

- Creating a caring and respectful process for handling the deceased
- Scheduling memorials to honor the lives of those who have passed and their caregivers
- Grouping support for residents and family by diagnosis or length of stay for the residents
- Clearly publicizing resident and family support services before and after loss
- Allowing and encouraging residents to make as many choices about their care as possible

The guides can be viewed online: [staff guide \(https://bit.ly/2H2qNto\)](https://bit.ly/2H2qNto); [residents and families guide \(https://bit.ly/2NLpjnZ\)](https://bit.ly/2NLpjnZ). Each guide includes a Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST) form, a portable medical order indicating which treatment a seriously ill person prefers; it is designed to work with an advance directive.

The guides have been distributed to nursing homes in Georgia and to several other states. Future plans include developing four videos to accompany the guides and distributing them statewide. To measure impact, researchers will assess knowledge and use of the POLST, as well as collect data from the Georgia Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey about experiences with family death.

Contact Dr. Miles for downloadable PDFs of the guides at tonimile@uga.edu.