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The Caregiver's Bereavement: Integrative Grief Therapy in Palliative Care

During palliative care, family caregivers (FC) face the cumulative effect of personal and relational losses for daily attendance of the patient's needs, losing previous relationship and witnessing degradation and suffering. However, in modern occidental society, family members tend to protect each other from the emotional distress related to the pain of loss. They need to sustain hope and keep functioning, so they suppress their grief manifestations while caring for the ill person. Therefore, for many FC, death occurs in a context of intense ambivalent feelings that persist during bereavement, due to unmet relational needs.

A comprehensive conceptual model of FC's bereavement was developed as a framework of an integrative grief therapy applied to palliative care. This method is eminently relational and experiential and encompasses specific therapeutic tasks depending on the individual needs. One is to focus in the inner experience through attuned inquiry. The therapist promotes internal and external contact within a secure and responsive relationship that activates the emotional reaction and regulates the arousal caused by the painful memories. Another task is to explore the relationship with the deceased, which is frequently marked by dependence and resentment for abandonment. These unacceptable feelings are recognized and validated as two parts of the caregiver's dilemma: the need to protect and, on the other side, to let go the patient. Expression of relational needs is encouraged, both in a symbolic relationship with the patient and with the significant others. When emotional regulation and attachment reorganization are accomplished, bereaved can develop new emotional meanings and achieve personal growth.



Alexandra Coelho, Grief Therapist, Clinical Psychologist in Palliative Medicine. Coordinates the Palliative Care Grief Consultation for bereaved families. Teacher and supervisor in grief therapy training courses. Leads an institutional program for grief support addressed to health professionals. Training in Integrative Grief Therapy, Family Therapy and Narrative Therapy. Researcher, interested in family caregiver's grief, published scientific articles and books chapters concerning grief trajectories and complicated grief mediators. Carried out validation studies of grief assessment tools to Portuguese population. Co-editor of "Grief Mediators". Currently, she is doing a PhD thesis concerning Anticipatory Grief of Caregivers. General Secretary of Portuguese Society of Studies and Grief Intervention (SPEIL) and member of Academic Center of Studies and Grief Intervention of Medicine Faculty, Lisbon University (NAEIL).



António Barbosa, Ph.D, is Full Professor of Psychiatry, Director of the University Clinic of Psychiatry and Medical Psychology and Director of the Bioethics Center of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Lisbon. Coordinator of the Scientific Committee of the Master Courses in Palliative Care and in Psychopathology of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Lisbon. Coordinator of the Liaison Psychiatry Unity of the Psychiatry Service and coordinator of the Center for Intervention in Psycho-Oncology at University Hospital of Santa Maria. President of the International College of Psychosomatic Medicine. Vice-President of Session on

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He has developed research in the area of psychosomatic, psycho-oncology, palliative care, grief and bereavement, clinical and psychiatric epidemiology, anthropology and sociology of health, bioethics, narrative medicine, medical education and psychotherapy

He is author of the book *Fazer o Luto* (2016), 250 articles and 65 book chapters, co-editor of 18 books and presented over 500 oral and poster presentations in scientific meetings.