



**PERINATAL LOSS**

Innovative Teaching Methods

Kateřina Ratislavov, Zuzana Hruřkov

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## **PERINATAL LOSS**

### **Innovative Teaching Methods**

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# About this book

This publication discusses a comprehensive approach to the professional psychosocial care provided to parents who experienced perinatal loss – the why, the what and the how of teaching and learning „soft“ skills in perinatal palliative care. Based on available evidence and best practices, it presents innovative teaching methods and principles of work with students of bachelor’s and master’s programmes, as well as students engaged in continuing professional development. The publication examines specific evaluation methods applied to perinatal palliative care. Communication is the basis of the psychosocial care provided to grieving parents. Also very important are various interpersonal skills, which are highlighted in the publication. Moreover, it presents a systematic approach to presenting, learning, and using these skills in practice. Professionals who look after parents who have experienced perinatal loss often point out the demanding nature of the care, stress, and strong emotions which affect not only the parents but also caregivers. Therefore, the book emphasizes the importance of systematic mental hygiene and care for the mental health of caregivers.

The text is divided into two main parts. The first part of the book focuses on theoretical didactic aspects of psychosocial perinatal palliative care and provides evidence for teaching this challenging topic. The second part presents practical exercises that are effective for achieving long-lasting change in the learners’ behaviour.

The publication is intended for teachers, lecturers, and facilitators who are engaged in teaching students of medical disciplines (midwives, neonatology or general nurses, medics) or social sciences (social workers, clinical psychologists, theologians, etc.). It also aims at the education of postgraduate students and continuing the professional development of experts who experience perinatal loss in practice. Moreover, the publication is suitable for organizers of educational workshops in maternity hospitals and neonatal departments.



# About the authors

## **Kateřina Ratislavová**

I am a lecturer at the Department of Nursing and Midwifery of the Faculty of Health Studies at the University of West Bohemia. I focus on psychology and communication in the Midwifery study programme. I am a midwife with psychotherapeutic training in dynamic psychotherapy. I also studied psychology and family education at the Faculty of Education at the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen and got a doctoral degree in Nursing at the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice. I cooperate with Dlouhá cesta (Long Journey) and Plzeňská zastávka (Pilsen Station), which are non-profit organisations working with parents who have lost a child. I provide advice to women who have experienced perinatal loss in the Pilsen region. I am a member of the Czech Society of Palliative Medicine and the Czech Chamber of Midwives.

## **Zuzana Hrušková**

I work as a psychotherapist and practice crisis intervention for families, couples, and individuals. I often work with people who have lost a child of any age and from any cause. Moreover, I work as an instructor on courses for assistants. I studied pre-school education at the Faculty of Education at Charles University in Prague with a focus on special education. I completed long-term psychotherapy training in family therapy of psychosomatic disorders in Liberec and I am really proud of that. I attended many other courses, including courses focused

on crisis intervention. I cooperate with the organization Dlouhá cesta and with the Psychosomatic Clinic in Prague. I am a member of the Section of Psychology Crises, Disasters, and Traumas of the Czech-Moravian Psychological Society.

# Preface

Dear colleagues,

We would like to offer you a publication based on scientific sources, our therapeutic experience, and experience in teaching courses for the caring professions. In the first part, the publication presents scientific knowledge derived from the teaching of perinatal palliative care in undergraduate, postgraduate, and continuous education. We analysed educational programmes that were evaluated and published in scientific databases.

We are both teachers and therapists who provide care to grieving families and their members. We have built on their experiences and would like to thank them for the trust they gave us, as well as for allowing us to publish their opinions regarding the grieving process, what helped them cope with the loss, and what, on the other hand, hindered the healing process. Although the experiences of those affected are similar in some way and the theory is generalized, we try to teach students respect for the differences among individuals and families, the diversity of human experience, and humility. Research studies showed that encountering death is an event that students fear in advance – they are not sure how to communicate with affected persons and colleagues, and often do not have enough information on how to take care of themselves. Students cannot anticipate many situations, but with preparation, they can learn how to be more responsive and better oriented to the care of their clients and themselves.

We listen to the experience of caregivers, who encounter death in practice and are willing to share their emotions, feelings, and knowledge. Since 2015, we have organized blended learning courses focused on the care provided to parents who have experienced perinatal loss. Courses are intended for midwives, and doctors including neonatologists, obstetricians, gynaecologists, crisis interventionists, paramedics, psychologists and psychotherapists, university teachers, and others. The course is described in detail in this publication, including the results of its evaluation.

Our recommendations, which we relate to individual topics, are the synthesis of evidence-based practice, our experience of teaching students, and our work with affected parents and professionals.

In the first part of the publication, we discuss the questions concerning psychosocial care for parents after perinatal loss, what should be the content of classes, and what methods should be applied to teach this topic. We introduce teaching methods that maximize learning in experiential teaching sessions. Considerable attention is concentrated on teaching communication skills, providing feedback, and assessing the achievement of learning objectives. Perinatal palliative care is a very sensitive and emotionally challenging topic and, therefore, we describe some specific methods for teaching students.

The second part of the publication offers practical exercises, scenarios, and suggestions for discussion and reflection. We prefer experiential learning, which is characterized by certain steps that lead to the transformation of experience into knowledge. We work with the Kolb's learning cycle theory, which describes procedures for effective experiential learning. This

theory summarizes the principles of learning from our own experience, from non-transferable experiences which help us acquire new knowledge.

Most of the practical exercises were published in the book Ratislavová, Hrušková (2020) *Psychosociální podpora při úmrtí miminka* [Psychosocial support by babys' death]. Their use in this scientific publication increases its practical and social impact.

In the framework of experiential learning, we focus on a variety of techniques and exercises to help students develop critical thinking, communication, and other soft skills. We aim to change students' attitudes and values, support their inner maturing, develop empathy and deepen mindfulness. Each chapter includes exercises that are focused on self-care, self-development, and self-awareness, as we strive to highlight the necessity and importance of mental health. Especially health workers often mention the fact that they do not know how to care for themselves. They are used to being available to their clients and patients, but often forget to look after themselves. Our aim is, therefore, to take care of overall health (physical, mental, relational, and spiritual) as a common part of teaching and practice.

# **PART I**

# Introduction

Why is it important to focus on the education of students who will provide care to parents who have experienced perinatal loss? The loss of an expected child is a challenging life event that can be traumatic (Badenhorst, 2007; Cacciatore, 2013; Farrales et al., 2020; Korenromp et al., 2005). Perinatal loss (miscarriage, stillbirth, neonatal death, medical termination of a pregnancy) affects up to 30 % of expecting parents (Faleschini et al., 2021). Research results show that the compassionate care and sensitive communication of health professionals can positively influence parents' decision-making, resilience, and long-term well-being (Ellis et al., 2016; Flenady et al., 2014; Lang et al., 2011). The quality of care and support that parents receive when experiencing perinatal loss and subsequent pregnancies have a major impact on the grieving process and coping with the loss (Bakhbakhi et al., 2017; Ravaldi et al., 2018).

Working with grieving parents in the field of perinatal care is a great challenge that requires a high level of knowledge and skill. A positive attitude of health professionals towards parents after perinatal loss is associated with previous education in the field of care for grieving parents, team support and hospital policy that supports health professionals who provide care for grieving parents (Chan et al., 2007; Chan and Arthur, 2009).

Most experts who deal with the experiences of parents after perinatal loss draw attention to the need for evidence-based

training in care after perinatal loss using a parent-centred integrated pathway to improve the experience of bereaved parents, education programs focused on relationships, and programs focused on grieving mothers and their families (Farrow et al., 2013; Farrales et al., 2020; Gandino et al., 2019; Nuzum et al., 2014; O'Connell et al., 2016; Shorey et al., 2017) *"The informed care that knowledgeable nurses provide at this crucial time can help grieving families on their difficult journey to emotional healing."* (DiMarco et al., 2002). The importance of communication and building a relationship with the patient are highly emphasized. Farrales et al. (2020) state that we should place less emphasis on the standardization of care, rigid protocol, and checklists; care should be focused on the relationship with the patient that underscores the nuances of each family, recognizes their unique culture, and prevents retraumatizing provider reactions.