

“Congratulations, I Am Sorry for Your Loss”. A Qualitative Study to Help Healthcare Providers Search for Words When a Baby Dies

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Abstract : Background: All care providers within mother and child care are confronted, at some point in their career, with the care for parents who (will) lose or have lost a baby. Obtaining the correct attitude and communicating well during these difficult moments are aspects that many healthcare providers continue to struggle with. Parents still encounter well-intentioned but inappropriate communication from healthcare providers. Aim: To study how communication, both verbal and non-verbal, around the death of a baby during pregnancy, birth, or in the first ten days postnatal was experienced by parents and healthcare providers. Methods: A qualitative study using grounded theory principles was conducted. Data were collected through 22 individual face-to-face in-depth interviews with parents who had lost a baby (n = 12) and intramural caregivers, such as midwives, nurses, gynecologists and neonatologists (n=10). In the first phase, data were analyzed within each group separately (parents and healthcare providers) and in the second phase, findings from both groups were compared and analyzed according to meta-synthesis principles. Results: The themes that emerged from the data demonstrated congruent experiences between the group of the parents and the health care providers. Both strengths and weaknesses in current care were named and suggestions for appropriate communication were formulated. Conclusion: Since most health care providers only occasionally care for parents with a deceased baby, a communication tool can optimize communication between healthcare professionals and parents who lose a baby. This is very important as the words which are said at this difficult period last a lifetime in the heads of parents.

Keywords : communication, death, perinatal loss, stillbirth

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