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## Promoting Healing After Bereavement

### A Two-Tiered Strategy for Preventing Complications of Bereavement in the First Thirteen Months Post-Loss: A Pilot Study Using Peer Supports with Professional Therapist Back-up

Mark D. Miller, Jackie Stack, Charles F. Reynolds III

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#### Highlights

- This manuscript illustrates that grieving individuals can be recruited, assigned, and retained in a peer support model intended to prevent complications of grieving in the first year post-loss.

#### Abstract

This feasibility and acceptance pilot study for preventing complications of bereavement within the first year post-loss recruited twenty adult griever within 9 months of becoming bereft and assigned consenting subjects to peer supporters trained by a non-profit bereavement support organization for weekly or bi-weekly telephone-based peer support until month 13 post-loss. Subjects who met DSM-5 criteria for MDD or showed an Inventory of Complicated Grief (ICG) Score exceeding 19, 6 months or more post loss, were assigned to 12-16 weeks of Interpersonal Psychotherapy (IPT) with an experienced therapist. Eight and six subjects completed the protocol assigned to peer support and IPT respectively with pre/post PHQ-9 scores of 5.38 (2.45) vs. 3.25 (4.13) [ $p=0.266$ ] and 16.67 (7.17) vs. 8.40 (5.73) [ $p=0.063$ ]; and pre/post ICG scores of 12.50 (4.72) vs. 5.00 (2.51) [ $p=0.016$ ] and 35.17 (5.12) vs. 8.4 (5.73) [ $p=0.063$ ]. Implications of this 2-tiered model of early intervention for preventing complications of grief are discussed.

**Keywords:** bereavement, grief, peer support, Interspersal psychotherapy, complicated grief

#### Background

Grieving the loss of another emotionally important human being is a universal phenomenon that the majority of griever manage to cope with adequately over time using traditional psychosocial supports from family, friends and religious or spiritual advisors. Griever without an adequate support system or who have other predisposing risk factors such as preexisting depression or anxiety disorders or who sustain multiple losses can develop complications resulting from the grieving process such as bereavement-related major depression,

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