

## **After-Death Care Protocol: A Final Act of Caring**

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**Statement of the Problem:** The current after-death care (ADC) protocol at a hospice facility fails to support nurses in finding meaning, sense of purpose, and in finding closure after the loss of a patient.

**Background/Literature Review:** A literature search was conducted using CINAHL, PubMed, and PsychINFO. Search terms included “post-mortem care,” “last office,” and “ADC”. Selection criteria included those studies conducted in the last 10 years, including nurses, and written in the English language. Five articles were reviewed; literature synthesis revealed a gap in nursing care of the body after death.

**Purpose/Aims:** This evidence-based practice project’s purpose is to develop an ADC protocol and checklist and to implement training for nursing staff at a hospice facility. Training objectives are to increase knowledge about evidence-based ADC with a focus on honoring the patient’s body and utilizing rituals.

**Methods/Measures:** In Fall 2019, an evidence-based ADC protocol was developed and informed by a literature review and nursing input. Key aspects involved bathing and honoring the patient with rituals and fragrance while offering presence to loved ones. Nursing staff were recruited for initial protocol training and to provide feedback. A four-question survey about ADC experience was administered to nursing staff (N=15) after protocol development.

**Findings:** Thirteen participants (86%) responded; 100% agreed honoring the patient’s body utilizing rituals supports sense of purpose, meaning and finding closure. Nurses who participated in the training described the experience using words/phrases such as “sacred,” “it feels right,” and “it completes the circle.”

**Implications for Practice:** The incorporation of an ADC protocol in a hospice facility impacts nursing by supporting meaning making and sense of purpose as well as fostering closure. For evidence-based ADC to take place, it is vital to have the management support. Next step is to present the ADC protocol to Shared-Governance for approval and implementation.

