

The Beginning of the Nightmare: The Communication of a Suicide Death

Invited lecture · Diego De Leo

Prof. Diego De Leo (the head of the Slovene Centre for Suicide Research and professor of Psychiatry at the Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia), is considered as one of top five world leading experts in suicidology by the international professional and scientific public. His research expertise includes definitional issues in suicidology, culture and suicide, international trends and national suicide prevention programmes. He has received numerous world-renowned awards for his scientific work. His bibliography includes over 420 peer-reviewed articles and 180 book chapters.

Abstract. Reporting the death of a loved one is a delicate task. How this is done can have a significant impact on both the recipient and the notifier, especially in the case of sudden, violent and traumatic death. If the death to be communicated concerns a case of suicide, emotional involvement and reactions can be particularly complex and disturbing. An empathetic, sensitive and attentive communication to the needs of the survivors can represent a first opportunity to support the bereavement process. The acquisition of specific skills for the delivery of the death notification is necessary for the professional who carries out the communication to increase self-efficacy, knowledge and perception of competence in this area. The declaration of death is configured as a process divided into sequential phases; the act of notification constitutes its central phase. Adequate preparation on the part of the communicator would be appropriate to contain the impact of the trauma both on the notifier and on the recipient of the notification. For the latter, appropriate assistance and follow-up protocols should be defined. An overview of best practices in the task of reporting sudden, violent and traumatic death is presented, and guidance is provided for formulating practices appropriate to different professions and for developing effective educational programmes.