

## **‘Care-Photography’ & ‘Photo Viewing’ as preventive Social Work-instruments in times of Corona.**

**April 15th 2020. Herman de Mönnink, monnink@home.nl**

Worldwide we see families and care professionals struggling with the sudden Corona health crisis and sudden death of loved ones. Because of protection measures against the spread of Corona-infections, some or no family relatives are permitted to visit their very sick loved ones. Even when they die (suddenly) the family is often kept at a distance. Caring professionals do what they can to help survive but when ‘cure’ is not possible ‘care’ is important. Quality of care is having a proper goodbye. With this massive Corona pandemic a lot of family members and friends are not facilitated in having such a proper goodbye.

The question is: how can Social Work contribute in preventing an epidemic of complicated stress and complicated grief when the Corona pandemic is over? Corona survivors can have difficulty with the black hole in their memory, physical, cognitive and emotional complaints: the so-called Post Intensive Care Syndrome (PICS). In case of death, mourning relatives say they have difficulty in coping with the sudden death of their loved ones. The Social Work-instruments of Care Photography and Photo Viewing can be of practical help in these cases.

**Care Photography** is making photos of the Corona patient during intake, cure, rehabilitation or dying process and additionally make remarks about the behavior of the Corona-patient in their patient file. These care photos will be used in after care Social Work-sessions, the so-called **Photo Viewing**. These photos and patient diary are available in the patient files and used by trained Social Workers as a Photo-ritual with surviving patients or mourning relatives.

Photography with the aim of facilitating grief is not new in hospitals, for example with perinatal death (death around delivery): a form of Grief Photography. This Photo-practice is researched extensively and proven effective. In former times a lot of parents were suffering from complicated grief and unfinished business syndrome because they were protected against themselves and advised even not seeing the baby. In every hospital nowadays it is common practice to make photos of the dying process of the child and of the dead body. There is enough evidence for Care Photography and Photo Viewing fulfilling the needs of mourning family members. The step-by-step process of the Photo Viewing-instrument is described in The Social Workers' Toolbox, <https://www.routledge.com/The-Social-Workers-Toolbox-Sustainable-Multimethod-Social-Work-1st-Edition/de-Monnink/p/book/9781138934344> (25.11 Photo viewing following a traumatic loss. Routledge, 2017)

and in:

[Photo viewing after traumatic death: Finding the missing piece.](#)  
Traumatology , Vol 25(4), Dec 2019, 226-234  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/trm0000206>

Internationally I shared these instruments with colleagues of the IWG, the International Workgroup on Death Dying and Bereavement because the pandemic character of Corona. I feel a sort of urgency to share this worldwide to a SW-audience because of the massive suffering Corona. In stead of experiencing a respectful death a lot of surviving relatives become frustrated in fulfilling their needs of a proper goodbye, of physical peace, of control, of emotional proximity, of information and of helping perspectives. In stead they have a high risk of developing complicated grief and unfinished business syndrome. How to cope with the sudden 'empty space' after Corona without a proper goodbye? Social Work can be of help as preventive health by offering a proper goodbye with Care Photography and Photo Viewing. At least to build visible memories of the lost loved one and therefore becoming more in control, experience more

emotional proximity, more physical peace, more information, and develop helping perspectives.

Nearly 40 years I work with survivors of traumatic death (stillbirth, homicide, suicide, fires, tsunami, earth quakes, airplane disasters); happily enough in a lot of cases there is Photo material we can use in a Photo Viewing; with the Tripoli aircraft disaster I trained ramp social workers of Victim Assistance Holland in Photo Viewing because a lot of family members could not believe their loved one suddenly had gone: 'seeing is believing and sometimes what you imagine is worse than reality in its worst forms'. They stay in prolonged shock and can have a lot of unanswered questions. Also with the MH17 disaster Photo Viewing was of great help. Research showed mourning relatives were very satisfied and thankful because of the Photo Viewing executed by trained Social Workers.

Please share this information. And feel free to ask question, Take care,

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