



How shall we mourn our dead?

Take your time and follow the path that's right for you.

By Leah Curtin, RN, ScD(h), FAAN

SINCE MAY 2020, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services have required nursing homes to provide data on COVID-19–related healthcare worker infection and mortality; no such requirement has been established for the hospital industry. This situation makes it difficult to obtain accurate mortality statistics for healthcare workers—including nurses—both globally and here in the United States.

In September, Amnesty International released an analysis estimating that at least 7,000 health workers have died around the world after contracting COVID-19, with more than 1,000 in the United States. An October report from the International Council of Nurses found that 1,500 nurses have died from COVID-19 in 44 countries, a figure the organization notes is an underestimate.

Journalists from *The Guardian* and Kaiser Health News have been compiling a database and noted that, as of December 16, they were investigating more than 1,400 reported cases of U.S. healthcare workers dying from COVID-19 that they contracted on the job. Those data were compiled through crowdsourcing and reports from colleagues, social media, online obituaries, workers' unions, and local media. A report by National Nurses United states that, as of September 16, 2020, an estimated 1,718 healthcare workers, including RNs, had died of COVID-19 and related complications.

The prevalence of estimates, rather than hard numbers, point to the need for better data collection, but even without a specific figure, we can safely say that too many nurses have died of COVID-19, leaving behind their grieving colleagues.

Most nurses are busy caring for the sick and dying—few have the time to grieve now, and usually they'll say grieving is for patients and families. I have no doubt that their colleagues and friends who have died during this pandemic have yet to be mourned.

But they will.

We'll all walk this journey in our own time. The key is to feel the pain and keep moving forward with life. Don't worry about how fast you heal; just be certain that with each passing day you will. I have a few thoughts borne from experience.

- The hardest time to learn about grief is when you're in the middle of it. For better or worse, we really are too busy right now to deal with grief.
- I discovered there's no course you can take because grief is a journey none of us knows until we're on it. The grieving process is just the path we must take until we eventually get to the other side of acceptance and joy. Until then, be gentle with yourself and take one day at a time.
- Being in the moment each day is much easier than looking and feeling something beyond that. Try it because it does work.
- Do you experience your emotions some days like a roller coaster? I sure did and still do from time to time. Take time to honor your emotions. Anger, sadness, fear, depression, loneliness, and deep heartache are unpredictable. But with these emotions come healing, so you need to ride them out until you once again find peace within.

Take time to honor your fallen colleagues. Establish scholarships in their names. Put up plaques. Tell their stories. Don't let them be forgotten. These actions will help all of us honor the bravest among us.

Leah Curtin

Leah Curtin, RN, ScD(h), FAAN
Executive Editor, Professional Outreach
American Nurse Journal

To view a list of references, visit myamericannurse.com/?p=72013.

Editor's note: Submit names of nurses who have died from COVID-19 at the American Nurses Association's Nightingale Tribute webpage (nursingworld.org/ana/about-ana/nightingale-tribute/).



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