

“4 to 6 weeks after the funeral, that’s when you feel most alone” – A review of earlier post-bereavement contact

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Introduction

Telephone follow-up has been shown to be a valuable tool in the post-bereavement period¹. Within our hospice we routinely follow-up next of kin (NOK) at 12 weeks, however we were keen to investigate whether earlier follow-up would be beneficial.

Aim

To establish whether contact at four to six weeks post-bereavement would allow for earlier identification of issues (and expedition of help) compared with current standard practice.

Methods

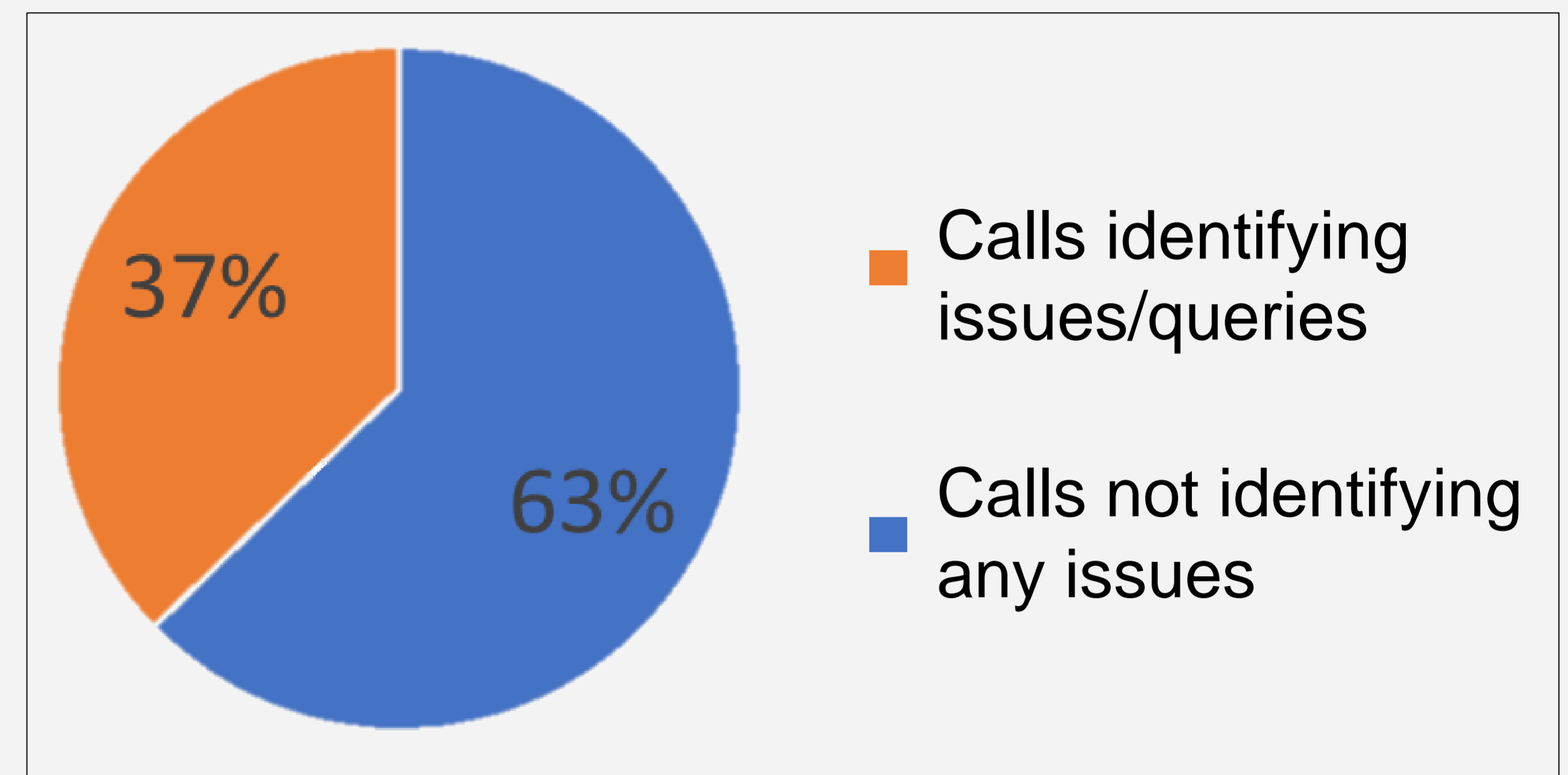
- Telephone call by medic to registered NOK of patients who had died on the Inpatient Unit at four to six weeks post-bereavement.
- Calls allowed for NOK to resolve any queries or questions and establish any ongoing issues.
- Steps could be taken to address highlighted concerns.
- Data were collected between January and September 2024
- NOK were excluded if there was no answer to repeat phone calls or if contact details were unavailable.
- Ethical approval was deemed unnecessary by the local research ethics service.

I can still hear my dad's death rattle... It keeps me awake at night

I would not have known who to contact

Results

Fifty-one patients' NOK were identified



Nineteen calls highlighted issues requiring assistance (37.3%)

These included:

- One acute grief reaction – support expedited and GP contacted by medic, with consent.
- Two had unresolved questions relating to their relatives' deaths, these were answered during the call
- Two requested further counselling / face-to-face debriefing.
- Four required referral to external services for issues surrounding equipment, finances etc.
- All 51 NOK contacted showed appreciation for the earlier call with many being unclear who to contact about the issues highlighted.

Conclusion

Over one-third of phone calls at this earlier stage identified issues. These could then be dealt with immediately, either over the phone or via referral to appropriate services.

Feedback from these earlier calls has been extremely positive and this has been implemented into medical team practice.

Acknowledgements

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References

1. Staniland L, Too C, Butshire L, Skinner S, Breen LJ. Best Practice in Telephone Bereavement Support: A Thematic Analysis of Bereavement Support Providers' Perspectives. Omega (Westport). 2023: 302228231199876