# Episode 3 – Ellie’s story – Transcript

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| Colin Gray: | So far, we have looked at why the spiritual well-being of front line care staff is so important why build resilience in the emotionally demanding environment of social and health care. I hope you’ve enjoyed trying out some of the practical ways that can help you cope day to day.  |
|  | So today we’re going a bit deeper and hear about one health care worker’s experiences of a really difficult and emotional situation, and what it felt like and what she did to look after her own needs and spiritual well-being. “Ellie’s Story” is a good example of why it is important to be aware of your needs and to look after your spiritual well-being. It’s a positive story which shows how Ellie draws strength from her experience to help her in the future.  |
| Interviewer:  | Hello Ellie. Why don’t you get us started by telling us a little bit about yourself and the role that you do? |
| Ellie: | So I’m Ellie. I’m a third-year student Nurse at the University of Edinburgh. I started my Nursing degree straight from school and I spent half my time out in placements in the local area. |
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| Interviewer: | That’s great. Can you give us some examples of the sorts of things you experienced day to day? And maybe how you look after yourself? |
| Ellie: | Yes. So whilst I’m out in placements. I meet lots of patients obviously and sometimes things don’t always go great or how you want them to. I think a good example is if a patient falls when you’re all transferring them, it’s quite stressful situation. So afterwards, I would just take some time out, you know have a bit of quiet time just to reflect on that and make sure I’m okay. |
| Interviewer: | And what happens if you don’t look after yourself? If you don’t take care of those emotional stresses? |
| Ellie: | I think they’re quite small things that sometimes it can be easy to not think about looking after yourself after then. And then after a whole day on shift, they can really build up and if you don’t take care of them at the time, then you have this big build up and it’s almost like a bit of a burn out. |
| Interviewer: | So, can you tell us about the situation where maybe you found yourself needing a bit of extra support?  |
| Ellie: | So earlier this year, I was on my district nurse placement. And it was the first time I’d experienced a patient who was in palliative care so end-of-life care. I spent my six weeks with them. I would see them most days that patient and so I sort of started to get to know them as a person. And towards the end of my placement it was quite clear that I was coming to the end of their life. And so that was quite hard to deal with and I think I turn to my mentors, my lecturers to talk to. |
| Interviewer: | So how did this experience make you feel? |
| Ellie: | It was quite a strange feeling actually, because I got to know patients in previous placements and you know build a relationship with them. But it was a like a grief that I felt but I wasn’t sure if I should be feeling it or if it was okay to feel it and so I’d go home sometimes after my placement and just be upset. But I wasn’t sure if I should be upset. |
| Interviewer: | What did you do then to look after your own emotional needs? |
| Ellie: | I talked to people. I would talk to my mum and my liaison lecturer, colleagues on the ward sometimes. And just accepting the fact that it was okay to be sad, it was okay to go home after a shift and say “I’ve had a bad day”. Just doing things that I really enjoyed doing outside of placement to take my mind off that I love swimming, so just going for a swim.  |
| Interviewer: | Is there anything that you do on the course that you learn how to look after yourself? |
| Ellie: | So we do a lot of reflective practice and after every placement, we’re asked to write something or make something to reflect on what was learned and how we felt during that placement. So I wrote a poem at the end of my placement, just to try and get my feelings out because what I think once they’re out you can use them in a positive way then. |
| Interviewer: | Ellie, can I asked you to read your poem for us? |
| Ellie: | Yeah; it’s called Annie. I see tiredness and fear as I looked into your eyesSo I take your shaking hand and placed it straight into mineEvery time we speak, you say I make your dayI was so shy at first, I didn’t know what to sayMy words were slow and jumbledWhat did you want to hear?You’d like hearing about my friends it seemed and what I’d learned this yearI like washing your hair as you tell me with my happinessBecause we laughed about weekend and on my clumsinessThe professional code states that we’re not meant to be friendsBut I’ve looked after you for weeks and now we’ve reached the endYour family couldn’t make it in timeThey lived too far awaySo it’s just you and I sitting hereIt’s a bright and sunny dayYou say some things so quietly, so I listen for the wordsThey’re the last thing that you spoke, so I make sure that they’re heardI didn’t get to meet you, when your body was on your sideThe view of patient’s lives, the nurses often get deniedYou told me stories of the younger you and the family that you’d raisedAs I did things you want to see for yourself, you’d pretended you weren’t fazeYou were the first one to leave meThe first hand I held to the endAnd despite my student nurse badge, I thought of you as a friendI sat with many others nowGiven them comfort by being thereBut the room still grows cold each time, as if it’s suddenly all bareEvery time I wiped the tears away, they are falling without consentAnd I remember why I chose this path and what being your nurse meant |
| Interviewer: | Thank you Ellie, that was really nice. How did writing a poem help you? |
| Ellie: | It helped me because I think if I’d kept those emotions inside, they would be a sad memory. But now I’ve put them into something else and I can read it and look at it as a positive thing to help me grow as a student nurse. You know it’s a nice way to remember that patient that I did care about and I did get to meet.  |
| Interviewer:Ellie: | You seem to have learned a lot from that experience Ellie. I wonder if there are any tips or advice you could give to other young professionals who might find themselves in this similar situation? What would be your top 3? So firstly, to talk to people, talk to your family or friends or colleagues. Once you start talking about the way you feel, it’s easier to understand why you feel like that and how you can move past it. Secondly, to accept how you’re feeling. It’s okay to be sad, to have a little cry. Accepting your feelings makes them easier to process and you don’t just drag them on and maybe burn out eventually from having too many of them. And thirdly, to reflect on it as a positive thing. Remember that you have helped someone when they need you and although it made you sad at the time, maybe you have been there for them when they really needed someone and that is a positive thing to look back on and that’s a good memory to have. |
| Colin Gray: | Listening to Ellie, you may have found some connections with experiences of your own. Ellie is clearly aware of how hard it is to balance her professional self with her emotional self. You know her reflective poem shows a sensitive and a caring professional responding to Annie. She supports Annie through the sharing of stories, through listening and even laughing together. Ellie also comes to acknowledge her own emotions and that it is ok to be sad. In fact, she highlights how important it is to find ways to express and let out those feelings. Finally, her top tips for looking after your spiritual well-being are:* To talk to people – you know colleagues, supervisors, family.
* To acknowledge and accept that it’s ok to be sad and,
* To use reflective practice to learn from your experiences.

Now it’s your turn. So every day, care workers experience emotional moments, you know big and small. Ask one of your colleagues about an emotional experience that they’ve had at work. Try to arrange a conversation at a quiet time like during a break. Ask them about how an emotional experience affected them and what they did to look after their spiritual needs and well-being. Ask them about how they balance their professional self with their emotional self. Finally, ask them for one piece of advice or their top tip for looking after your spiritual well-being.Hopefully, today has given you some insights into the sorts of emotional experiences that care staff encounter. In the next episode we’ll explore the different arrangements that organisations provide to support staff through those experiences. |