

MDS Alert

See How Other Facilities Honor Resident Deaths

Individual facilities and staff members respond differently to resident deaths. If you believe your facility could do more to acknowledge the loss of a resident through a formal expression of grief or honor- and that doing so would benefit both staff and surviving residents - you may be searching for ideas.

Here are some examples of what facilities around the country do to acknowledge the loss of a resident, as supplied from a small sample of self-identified MDS coordinators:

- Sharing news of a resident's death to staff through an email or phone call as soon as possible, especially for staff members who worked closely with the deceased resident
- Conducting an annual/biannual/quarterly memorial for all residents who passed within that timeframe, with residents' families invited and included - as well as all surviving residents and staff
- Lighting a candle for each deceased resident to honor them at the memorial ceremony
- Creating a special memorial quilt to cover the body as it's removed from the facility
- Holding a moment of silence or prayer service in the resident's room, over the resident's body before it is removed from the room
- Leaving surviving residents' doors open as the deceased resident is carried out
- Singing Amazing Grace or another song as the resident's body is removed
- Encouraging all available staff to pause in their workday and line the halls to witness the resident's body's removal, and perhaps including a moment of silence or prayer
- Sending a card to the resident's family with signatures from staff
- Sending a copy of the resident's preferred holy book that is also signed by all staff
- Draping white satin (or other material) across the resident's bed, along with a photograph or favorite item, before the resident's family arrives to clear the room

Talk with your social services colleagues and team members in other departments for more ideas on how to implement a procedure for honoring deceased residents and acknowledging the loss that is surely felt by staff and surviving residents alike. Although discussions about the practicalities surrounding death are frequently taboo in American culture, bringing attention to those realities can be helpful for everyone.