Title:
Navigating an Uncertain Journey of Pregnancy After Perinatal Loss

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Session Title:
Coping Strategies for Infant Loss  
Slot:  
D 18: Sunday, 29 October 2017: 2:45 PM-4:00 PM  
Scheduled Time:  
2:45 PM

Keywords:  
journaling, perinatal loss and pregnancy

References:  

Abstract Summary:  
The metaphor of navigating an uncertain journey may improve care of pregnant women through greater understanding of the emotional, physical, and social challenges that women experience when they become pregnant again after a perinatal loss.

Learning Activity:  

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<tr>
<th>LEARNING OBJECTIVES</th>
<th>EXPANDED CONTENT OUTLINE</th>
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<td>The learner will be able to list at least three areas of concern for mothers pregnant after a prior perinatal loss.</td>
<td>Three basic areas of concern for mothers: physical, emotional/mental, and social. Broken down further in themes: 1) Staying Alert: Noting Physical Symptoms, 2) Dealing with Uncertainty: Expressing Emotions, 3) Dreaming of the Destination: Evolving Thoughts of Baby, 4) Traveling Together:</td>
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<td>The learner will be able to describe at least two strategies for helping a mother pregnant after a prior perinatal loss.</td>
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<td>Assessment: listening to their stories of past pregnancies, evaluating anxiety levels at start and throughout pregnancy, evaluate prenatal attachment and confidence. Intervention: anticipatory guidance, reinforcing that mother not alone - common experience, education not only to mother but her social support system if able, make nurses and other health care providers available to mother for support (calls, frequent visits, emergency plans).</td>
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**Abstract Text:**

**Objective:** This study aimed to gain insight into women’s experiences, anxiety, and prenatal attachment over the course of pregnancy subsequent to prior perinatal loss through written pregnancy diaries.

**Background:** Grief and bereavement are the most common responses to perinatal loss and may last for months or years (Cacciatoore, 2013; Wojner, Swanson & Adolfsson, 2011). Loss at any gestational age is, for the mother, simultaneously the loss of part of self, of a unique child, and of the future with that child (Davis, 2014). Women with a perinatal loss history describe a desire to both get pregnant again to fill the void created by the death of their baby and to maintain a connection to their dead child (Lee, McKenzie-McHarg & Horsch, 2013).

**Subjects:** Diaries were from 19 pregnant women with a past history of miscarriage, stillbirth, or neonatal death. The participants were primarily Caucasian, 23 to 41 years old, had one to six prior losses, high school to graduate school education, and a wide range of incomes.

**Methods:** Qualitative design was used following Colaizzi’s steps for phenomenological analysis (Colaizzi, 1978) of diary entries written during an intervention study (Author, Schwartz, Krowchuk & McCoy, 2014).

**Results:** A metaphor emerged from the data of navigating a pregnancy journey that feels scary and uncertain, towards the goal of reaching their desired destination, a healthy infant, emerged from women’s personal accounts. Six themes were discovered: 1) Staying Alert: Noting Physical Symptoms, 2) Dealing with Uncertainty: Expressing Emotions, 3) Dreaming of the Destination: Evolving Thoughts of Baby, 4) Traveling Together: Connecting with Others, and 5) Moving Forward: Reflecting on Sense of Self. The interaction of several themes is described as 6) Staying on Track: Navigating through Pregnancy.

**Conclusion:** Women pregnant again after prior perinatal loss made diary entries that included their fears and hopes, ways they coped with their emotions, the evolution of their thoughts of baby, relationships with family and friends, and their own sense of who they were in this pregnancy. Women may find journaling helpful in dealing with the anxiety and fear that characterize pregnancy after loss. The metaphor of navigating an uncertain journey may improve care through greater understanding of the emotional, physical, and social challenges that women experience when they become pregnant again after a perinatal loss.