

## Emotional Impact Of Working With the Dying

By Irene Smith. Everflowing Educational Resources, 2002 (distributed by Information for People, P.O. Box 1038, Olympia, WA 98507-1038; 800-754-9790; [www.info4people.com](http://www.info4people.com), paperback, 22 p. Also includes 21 min. Christmas with Chuch video, 28 min. Presentation CD, 60 min. Group Sharing CD. \$69.95. No ISBN.

Reviewed by Lisa Mertz

Irene Smith is a true pioneer in the field of touch therapy. Since 1982, she has been offering touch to people with AIDS and other life-threatening illnesses in the San Fransisco Bay area. For more than 10 years, she has been a West Coast assistant to Dr. Elisabeth Kubler Ross, a leader in the field of death and dying.

Smith's educational outreach program, called Everflowing, teaches touch skills as an integral aspect of palliative or end-of-life care. "I believe," Smith says, "the most challenging aspect of this service is the emotional impact. Therefore I have assembled the information in this package in hopes that your interest in this service will be nurtured and supported in the healthiest way possible."

The handbook, *Emotional Impact Of Working With The Dying*, provides an overview of the issues that are explored on the CDs and video: the challenges of intimacy, loss and burnout. Smith says, "The sharing of touch, of responding to the intimacy of a clients vulnerability and receiving the gratitude is a delicate process that challenges all aspects of my being. The weaving together of these factors as a professional creates the tapestry that is this field of massage" (p. 4).

She explains that grief is not an isolated feeling or event, but a disorganized, sometimes ruthless, process that also is one of our sweetest gifts. Burnout, Smith says, can develop from the experiences of increase sensitivity and expanded consciousness that may grow out of doing this kind of work, upsetting life's balance. She recommends participating in a support group, keeping a journal and creating ceremonies to validate feelings and bring resolution.

On the video *Christmas with Chuck*, Smith introduces a slide show from 1988 of her final touch session with a client who had AIDS and Kaposi's sarcoma, Chuck Buck. Her narrative expresses the challenge of receiving Chuck's love and gratitude in return for her nurturing touch, dealing with her own anger toward his disease and the difficulty of saying goodbye. As she slowly speaks, Smith leaves space for the viewer's thoughts and feelings to arise.

The CD *Group Sharing* presents a discussion by a group of workshop participants after viewing *Christmas with Chuck*. In response to their experience of the video, they share deeply personal feelings concerning the deaths of loved ones and clients. On the CD *Presentation*, Smith offers a profoundly affecting lecture on the emotional impact of this kind of work.

More and more resources are becoming available for those of us who work with seriously ill patients and clients in hospitals, in their homes or in hospices. This multimedia package offers significant support materials for practitioners who work in this area. Smith has included guidelines in the package for the use of these materials, either personally or with a group.

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