We are not weak. We are strong. And one of the ways to stay strong is to find someone who will appreciate your experiences, someone to talk to.

After a particularly intense experience it is beneficial to debrief immediately. My "in the field" protocol was for nurses, social workers, nurse's aides and chaplains to call me immediately following any situation that may have upset them. They were to tell me right away their "story", to recount what had happened in all its often grizzly detail. This quick release prevents the images from "sticking" to us. It gives us the assurance we are not alone, that we are safe.

If your agency does not offer that immediate phone call opportunity, find someone you can trust to be your touchstone. Set this up ahead of time, before you need to make the phone call. No answers are needed, no judgements, just a listening ear. This debriefing is a step by step recounting of the events. The retelling releases pent up intensities, emotions, uncertainties, and sometimes fears and horrors. You are releasing, letting go, so you can continue on. Again, very important to remember, this is not a sign of weakness, it is good mental health.

Life's Appreciation

Dying is not a medical event. It is a social, communal experience. It isn't our medical expertise that will help us be effective, it is our social skills, our listening skills, and our knowledge of the dying process and our end of life skills that are valuable.

Working in end of life is like being a salmon, you're always swimming against the current. As caregivers, our skills are contrary to much of what we have been medically taught. It is important to recognize that people may not understand the care we are providing. They may question our approach. We need to be confident in our knowledge, our skills, and within ourselves. If we have self-confidence we can go home at the end of the day and feel good about the special interactions we have had.

Working with end of life reminds us of the precariousness of life. It shows us the gift we have in just being able to get out of bed in the morning. The gift of being able to reach out to others with a helping hand. Gratitude and appreciation for the life we have is the gift our patients and families give us.