

Reflections from local teleconference panelist:

## **“FEELINGS ARE LIKE THE ANTENNAE OF THE SOUL”**

*By Rev. Tim Dean, chaplain, Cayuga Medical Center*

When I think about someone with cancer facing death, my mind and heart become flooded with feelings. Some of these feelings seem to be at odds with one another: I feel angry and compassionate, helpless and hopeful, inadequate and strong, anxious and at peace. Each of these responses is authentic and each one is an expression of grief.

Grief can be so overwhelming because it forces us to feel everything at the same time. We can be both thankful for the gift of a loved one's life and influence, and tortured by the thought of that person's death. The key to knowing how to respond to these fractured feelings is by staying present to them. Feelings are like the antennae of the soul. Feelings can give us enormous insight and information—if we learn how to pay attention.

If we stuff those feelings down, we're not being present to the moment, or to the loved ones who surround us. Tending to these feelings is difficult work that requires compassion, insight, and ingenuity. Especially with the emotional/spiritual aspects of cancer, one size doesn't fit all. Each person's reaction and need is unique.

So we have to employ a number of different tools to be able to tailor our responses, and when things don't seem to fit—it's time to try something else, to make an alteration! A wise person once said, “If the only tool you have is a hammer, pretty soon everything starts to look like a nail.” To be effective caregivers, we need gentler tools to help meet the diverse needs and feelings we all face at the end of life.

*Tim Dean is one of three local panelists who will take part in a local discussion March 24 from 4:00-4:30 p.m. following the live broadcast of the 2010 Living with Grief Teleconference: Cancer and End-of-Life Care. Other panelists are Pauline Cameron, palliative care manager at Hospicare & Palliative Care Services of Tompkins County, and Bob Riter, associate director of the Cancer Resource Center of the Finger Lakes.*

[Find out more](#) about the teleconference.