

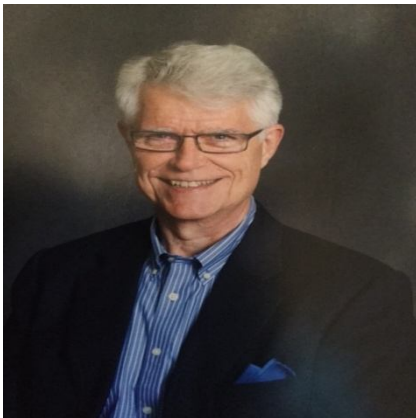
## Thomas Attig

### **Is Evidence-Based Practice an Appropriate Model for Grief Counseling?**

Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) in medicine and related healthcare disciplines takes root in desires to make healthcare a SCIENCE, eliminate quackery, minimize harm, promote consistent diagnosis and prognosis, and standardize treatment. Quantitative clinical trials provide research evidence. Clinical expertise resides in communication about and administration of physical treatment. Patients express values in response to clinician recommendations. Critics hold that medicine is also an ART focused on whole-person care requiring skillful attunement and caring response to particularities of individual and family experiences and struggles to live meaningfully with malady, crisis, transition, loss, suffering, recovery, and mortality.

EBP in psychology is embodied in the DSM catalog of mental disorders and treatment protocols that gives central place to quantitative research, treating pathologies, and patient compliance with treatment recommendations. Some favor more rigorous brain science and pharmacological treatments. Critics point to DSM failures to ensure consistency in diagnosis and treatment and provide persuasive accounts of supporting studies, and, more universally, to mistaking normal human experiences as pathologies and dismissal of resilience-centered positive psychology.

This presentation urges that an EBP model for grief counseling is inappropriate because a) grieving is not a pathology to be treated and b) the most important “evidence” required derives from unique stories told by grieving individuals and families. It offers a model of grief counseling as predominantly an ART focused on skillful attunement and caring response to particularities of individual and family experiences of brokenness and sorrow and struggles to relearn how to live meaningfully in the aftermath of bereavement.



Thomas Attig, PhD., Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at Bowling Green State University (Ohio) is the 2015 recipient of the Death Educator of the Year Award from the Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC) and the 2008 Lifetime Achievement Award of the International Network of Personal Meaning. He is the author of *How We Grieve: Relearning the World* (Oxford, Revised, 2011), *The Heart of Grief: Death and the Search for Lasting Love* (Oxford, 2000), *Catching Your Breath in Grief...and grace will lead you home* (Breath of Life Publishing, 2012), and numerous articles and reviews on grief and loss, care of the dying, suicide

intervention, death education, the ethics of interactions with the dying and bereaved, and seeking wisdom about mortality, dying, and bereavement. He is Co-Editor with Judith Stillion of *Death, Dying, and Bereavement: Contemporary Perspectives, Institutions, and Practices* (Springer, 2015). He spent the greater part of his career (1972-95) at Bowling Green, where he served as department chair for eleven years and with his colleagues established the world's first Ph.D. in Applied Philosophy in 1987. A Past President of ADEC, he also served as Vice-Chair of the Board of the International Work Group on Death, Dying, and Bereavement (IWG). He holds degrees in philosophy from Northwestern University (BA) and Washington University in St. Louis (MA and PhD), where he studied existential phenomenology with Herbert Spiegelberg. He currently resides in Victoria, BC, Canada and devotes his time to writing and speaking. He invites you to visit his website at [www.griefsheart.com](http://www.griefsheart.com).