

**“Enhancing Interprofessional  
Collaboration and Learning for  
Strengthening Primary Health Care”**

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Faculty of Medicine, Public Health and Nursing  
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## TUFH 2021 ABSTRACTS

Title	COMPASSION, COUNSELLING AND COLLABORATION - SUPPORTING INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES AFFECTED BY COVID-19 IN CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA
Type	Oral Presentation What can we learn from your Primary Health Care Practice and Experiences?
1st Author	PAT MAYERS
Co-Authors	PAT MAYERS
Country	SOUTH AFRICA
Abstract N <sup>o</sup>	TUFH814
Content	<p>Background: During the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Cape Town (December 2020-January 2021), the rate of admissions and deaths was significantly higher than in the first wave. Many individuals and families experienced a high level of distress and anxiety, and the public mental health support services were unable to meet the needs. Methods: A small group of volunteers was established to offer counselling to individuals and families in need of support or bereavement guidance. All work was done remotely through telephonic or what's app contact. Volunteers were mainly mature women with varied backgrounds and professions. Most counsellors had graduate qualifications in mental health nursing, social work or psychology and were joined by experienced lay counsellors. The group provided two broad services: trauma counselling and guidance to bereaved families on safe funerals and COVID-19 safety. Cases were drawn from an online database in which deaths in the district were recorded, and specific referrals were made from contact tracers to the counselling group. Counsellors dealt with a range of concerns: anxiety, fear, grief reactions and complex cases such as multiple deaths in a family, the death of young adults, dead on arrival cases and families who were in denial of COVID-19. Conclusion: This paper will reflect on the group's learnings with respect to the challenges of trauma and bereavement counselling in the pandemic, the roles of volunteers as support for public health services, and the perceived value of this service to communities in distress.</p>