Riverbend City: Grief and Family Systems

**Introduction: Welcome to Riverbend City**

Expository Text: This mission illustrates the role of the multidisciplinary practitioner in working through conflicts that arise in the multidisciplinary team. In this case, Sheldon's sister — 18 years younger than him — has been increasingly volatile. She lives in California and is saying that she can't come out to see him because she is afraid to fly. However, she is now calling family members (Bruce and Shirley) and telling them both how Sheldon's care should be handled and has said several times that she intends to speak at his funeral. Bruce is concerned, because the burial needs to be within 24 hours. Susan tries to help navigate the conflict — particularly with Rabbi Zimmermann. The mission ends with a branching interactive exercise that invites the learner to help Susan explore solutions.

**Characters in this Mission:**

Susan Florman – Hospice Social Worker, Compassionate Choice Hospice

Shirley Greenberg – Riverbend City Resident

Sheldon Greenberg – Riverbend City Resident

Bruce Greenberg – Sheldon Greenberg's Son

Judith Greenberg-Wolf – Riverbend Senior Services

Charlotte Lambert – Hospice Nurse, Compassionate Choice Hospice

Rabbi Moshe Zimmermann –Senior Rabbi, Beth Shalom Synagogue

**SCENE 1: RONDO NEIGHBORHOOD, GREENBERG HOME**

Expository Text: Susan stops by the Greenberg home for a routine visit. Sheldon, while in reasonably good spirits, is growing more frail every day and it is clear that he does not have a lot of time left. Shirley brings Susan to Sheldon's room, where he is chatting with Rabbi Zimmermann. Susan soon learns that there is a new issue weighing on Sheldon's mind.

**Dialogue 01: Shirley announces to Sheldon that Susan has come to see him.**

**SHIRLEY:**

Sheldon, honey … look who’s here. Susan. She stopped by to see how you’re doing. (Aside to Susan) He isn’t very strong today. Try not to tire him out too much, alright?

**SUSAN:**

(aside to Shirley) Sure thing. Thanks for the heads-up. (Louder, to Sheldon) Hi Mr. Greenberg. Your wife tells me you’re a little tired today, so I won’t stay long, but I wanted to stop by and

see how everything is going for you. Do you feel like you’re getting all the help you need from hospice?

**SHELDON:**

(weak) Oh, yes. You all have been so kind. I can’t begin to say how much of a help you all have been.

**RABBI ZIMMERMANN:**

Hello, Miss Florman. It’s good to see you again.

**SUSAN:**

Hello, Rabbi. The same to you! I’m not interrupting, I hope?

**SHELDON:**

No, not at all. I was just telling the Rabbi about my wild-thing of a sister.

**SHIRLEY:**

Oh, she’s a wild thing alright. She’s a no-goodnik is what she is.

**SHELDON**:

Oh, now sweetheart, don’t talk like that. Judith is the only sister I have. She just grew up at a different time, so she has her own way of seeing things.

**SHIRLEY**:

A very self-centered way.

**SUSAN:**

I feel like I walked into the movie halfway through. Can someone help me out?

**RABBI ZIMMERMANN:**

Sheldon asked his sister to come visit before he passes away, but it’s looking like she may not be able to come.

**SUSAN:**

Oh… I would imagine that’s very disappointing.

**SHIRLEY:**

It’s more than disappointing. She should be here for her brother. She’s his sister — she should be here before he passes, G-d forbid, and she should be here afterward to do her duty.

**SHELDON:**

Judith isn’t very religious. She doesn’t really understand why it’s important to Shirley and me that she be here before I pass.

**SUSAN:**

I don’t want to intrude on a sensitive family matter, but if there’s any way I can help with this, let me know. How‘s everything else going?

Dialogue 02: Sheldon articulates his disappointment that Judith probably won't make it to Riverbend City before he passes away.

**SHELDON:**

Oh, very well. Very well. Everyone is so good to us — the women from the synagogue, they’ve been cooking every sort of comfort food ever invented. I don’t have much appetite these days, but a bite or two of these things tastes like heaven.

Shirley, would you get Susan some of that kugel that Mrs. Katz brought over? I’ll be she’s never had kugel before.

**SUSAN:**

(catching a look from Sheldon) That sounds lovely.

**SHIRLEY:**

Sure… have you ever had kugel?

**SUSAN:**

I don’t think so.

**SHIRLEY:**

Oh, you’ll love it. I’ll be right back. (she leaves)

**SHELDON:**

Thanks. I didn’t want to say anything in front of Shirley. She already is mad at Judith, but I was wondering if you could maybe try talking to Judith and see if you can make her understand that we don’t have much time. She isn’t a bad person, but I don’t think she understands how sick I am and … well, it’s hard to come right out and say something like that to your sister, especially when you don’t talk very often to start with.

**SUSAN:**

Isn’t this something you would do, Rabbi?

**RABBI ZIMMERMANN:**

Ordinarily, yes, but Sheldon’s sister is not very religious. I have tried calling, but I haven’t been able to reach her and she does not return my messages.

**SUSAN:**

Well, I’ll be happy to try, but I don’t have high hopes that she’ll listen to me if she hasn’t listened to either of you.

**SHELDON:**

I appreciate you making the effort. I really do want a chance to say goodbye to her face to face and I’d like her to speak at my funeral.

**RABBI ZIMMERMANN:**

Which could be a problem if she isn’t able to get here quickly. It would be best if she came now, I agree.

**SCENE 2: COMPASSIONATE CHOICE HOSPICE, SUSAN FLORMAN'S OFFICE**

Expository Text: Back at her office, Susan attempts to sort through the issues in the Greenberg case. As she speaks with various individuals, she considers how a multidisciplinary approach will enhance the eventual solution and outcome.

Instructional Prompt: Click on all highlighted people to hear their concerns about the situation with Sheldon.

**Dialogue 03: Susan calls Judith, Sheldon's sister, to discuss her participation in Sheldon's funeral.**

**SUSAN:**

Hi, this is Susan Florman of Compassionate Choice Hospice in Riverbend City. Is this Judith Greenberg-Wolfe?

**JUDITH:**

It is. Hospice. Is this about Sheldon?

**SUSAN:**

Yes, it is.

**JUDITH:**

Oh no…. (bursts into tears) he’s gone. I can’t believe I didn’t get to say goodbye to my own brother!

**SUSAN:**

No… no! Sheldon hasn’t passed away, but the family did express some concern to me that you might not have an opportunity to talk to him before he dies.

**JUDITH:**

Obviously, I want to be there with my brother and nephew, but it isn’t that easy. I work as a stage manager for a local theatre company and we just opened this week. I can’t just up and leave. I told Sheldon that I can try to plan to be there at the end of the month. I know that’s three weeks away, but it’s just the best I can do. I’ve started a eulogy for him, too, that I really want to read at his funeral. It’s sad, but he he was such a great brother and I want to tell everyone that.

**SUSAN:**

I get the impression that he hopes to see you now, while he still can.

**JUDITH:**

I understand that, but it isn’t that simple. It may be that a eulogy is the best I can offer.

**SUSAN:**

My understanding is that there may be a problem with that, though. Because of the speed with which the burial needs to occur.

**JUDITH:**

That’s just the rabbi imposing his law upon us. The airlines can have me there in less than a week, but I have to have proof before I can get a bereavement fair.

**SUSAN:**

Is cost the issue keeping you from attending the funeral in a more timely manner?

**JUDITH:**

I wouldn’t say it’s the only issue, but it’s a pretty significant one.

**SUSAN:**

If I could help you get a flight for the same price as the bereavement fair, would that allow you to come out now?

**JUDITH:**

Not really. I am stage managing a production that just opened this week. I can’t just walk out in the middle of this.

**SUSAN:**

What would a good outcome to this situation look like to you?

**JUDITH:**

That he not be in this situation to start with. I don’t know… that the rabbi and Shirley not make such a case out of everything. That I get to do my job here in California and then my sisterly duties in Riverbend City.

**SUSAN:**

Well, it’s my understanding that Shirley and your brother are taking a lot of comfort from religion right now. Am I hearing you correctly that it isn’t as much a factor in your value system?

**JUDITH:**

Not at all. I hate all the Torah this and Synagogue that. I am sure I would be happier if I bought into all that stuff, but I just don’t and I really don’t understand why everything has to be rush, rush, rush once it actually happens. It feels like they’re deliberately trying to exclude me.

**SUSAN:**

Well, let me make some calls and see if there is any leeway at all. Can I call you back at this number?

**JUDITH:**

Yeah, sure. There’s a machine on this phone. I’ll call you back if I’m not home when you call. I have to go, though….I’ve got a call coming in from the theatre that I have to take. Thanks for your help with all this. I know I sound like a jerk, but I do love my brother. I just hate organized religion.

**Dialogue 04: Susan calls Rabbi Zimmermann to pursue the issue of Judith's participation in Sheldon's funeral.**

**SUSAN:**

Rabbi Zimmermann, please.

**RABBI ZIMMERMANN:**

Moshe Zimmermann.

**SUSAN:**

Rabbi … this is Susan Florman.

**RABBI ZIMMERMANN:**

Ah… Miss Florman. How are you?

**SUSAN:**

I’m fine, thank you. I just got off the phone with Sheldon’s sister and I wanted to check a couple things with you.

**RABBI ZIMMERMANN:**

Yes?

**SUSAN:**

Well …. I got the distinct impression that a lot of her ambivalence is around religion, not whether or not she wants to see her brother.

**RABBI ZIMMERMANN:**

I’ve gotten the same impression. It’s unfortunate that she can’t respect her brother’s decisions about such an important issue.

**SUSAN:**

I’m not sure what she’s going to do in terms of getting here before he passes away, but I wanted to know how absolute it is that Sheldon be buried within 24 hours.

**RABBI ZIMMERMANN:**

That is the goal and the ideal, but exceptions can be made. There just needs to be a good reason and thus far, Judith hasn’t provided one.

**SUSAN:**

Is this something that Sheldon decides or is it purely a religious decision?

**RABBI ZIMMERMANN:**

Ultimately, it is up to Shirley and to an extent, me. Obviously, we would take his wishes into consideration, but it’s the responsibility of the mourners to decide the extent to which they will follow the laws relating to burial.

**SUSAN:**

While showing respect to the deceased and obeying Jewish law, what is the latest you can delay burying him?

**RABBI ZIMMERMANN:**

No more than three days, I’ll say that.

**SUSAN:**

Alright. Clearly I need to hear more from Judith and see what’s really going on, but I thank you for your time. This has helped me understand the issue better.

**RABBI ZIMMERMANN:**

You’re welcome. Thank you for your efforts in mediating this.

**SUSAN:**

You’re welcome. I’ll talk to you soon.

**Dialogue 05: Charlotte stops by Susan's office to discuss an issue that has come up with the Greenbergs.**

**CHARLOTTE:**

Hi, Susan. Do you have a minute?

**SUSAN:**

Sure… what’s up?

**CHARLOTTE:**

Well, it’s Mr. Greenberg. I’m pretty sure his pain has been increasing steadily, but he’s still only taking Tylenol for pain. I just don’t think he’s getting the care he’s entitled to and I think it’s because Rabbi Zimmermann and Shirley are so adamant against the use of morphine.

**SUSAN:**

Have you spoken to Sheldon himself?

**CHARLOTTE:**

Yes, and he says this is what he wants, but I am just not convinced. I think he’d like better pain management but he’s concerned about how Shirley will take it if he tries stronger medications.

**SUSAN:**

Do you have some thoughts on how to address the issue?

**CHARLOTTE:**

Well, the family really respects you. If you suggest that he could take more morphine, they would go along with it.

**SUSAN:**

I am not sure how comfortable I am just inserting myself into this issue. I was planning on swinging out there sometime tomorrow. I’ll try to talk to Sheldon one on one and see if I can find out what he would like.

**CHARLOTTE:**

Great. I don’t think I am trying to push my own agenda, but it really makes me sad to see someone who is suffering more than necessary.

**SUSAN:**

I understand. I need to get to another meeting. Is there anything else I can do for you?

**CHARLOTTE:**

No, I don’t think so. Thanks for following up on this.

**SUSAN:**

You’re welcome. Talk to you later.

**SCENE 3: RONDO NEIGHBORHOOD, GREENBERG HOME**

Expository Text: Susan returns to the Greenberg home the next day to share the information she's obtained from Judith and to broach the issue of pain management.

**Dialogue 06: Bruce discusses the situation of his aunt's participation in Sheldon's funeral.**

**BRUCE:**

Hi, Susan. Good to see you again. You sure weren’t kidding when you said you’d be leading my Dad’s care team.

**SUSAN:**

Thank you, Bruce. I know things are getting difficult, so I really appreciate you giving me such a warm welcome.

**SHIRLEY:**

It’s true. I don’t think we could have done this without you.

**SUSAN:**

Well, again… thanks. What brought me over here today is that I’ve spoken to Judith a couple times and I think we might be in a better place in terms of understanding everyone’s individual concerns and needs. My impression from talking to Judith is that she is concerned that the service will be — and these are her words — too religious.

**SHIRLEY:**

Oh, that’s just like Judith. She didn’t come to our wedding, or to Bruce’s Bar Mitzvah … or his wedding. Now she wants to make Sheldon’s funeral about her and not about him or G-d. It’s so disrespectful.

**BRUCE:**

I have to admit, Susan, it seems bizarre to me that she wants to participate in the funeral. She’s never done anything religious in all the time I’lve known her.

**SHIRLEY:**

She may not be religious but Sheldon is, and he’s actually getting more interested in religion. She can’t just take this away.

**SUSAN:**

Alright. One last question. How strongly do you both feel about him being buried within 24 hours? Is that engraved in stone for you both, or would you be able to delay the burial?

**BRUCE:**

It’s not that unusual to make a little exception in order to ensure everyone can attend. Three days would be the most, though.

**SUSAN:**

Alright. I‘ll be talking to her again this weekend, so let me see if I can get us all to a point we can agree upon.

**Dialogue 07: Susan broaches the subject of morphine**.

**SUSAN:**

There is another issue I need to bring up — pain medication. Charlotte mentioned to me that she was getting a lot of pushback from you two even though it seems like Sheldon’s actual pain is getting stronger and more frequent.

**BRUCE:**

I’ve noticed the same thing, but even though I disagree, I think he’s making this decision on his own. He really wants to be able to talk to people who come to see him. I keep trying to explain to him that it would be possible to have better pain management and still be lucid.

**SHIRLEY**:

It really scared him the way he got when he was getting that medicine in the hospital. He was so out of it, he couldn’t connect to anyone or anything for more than a second or two.

**SUSAN:**

Okay. Do either of you mind if I recommend some other options?

**SHIRLEY**:

No, not at all. I think he’s still going to tell you the same thing we are.

**SUSAN:**

Fair enough. I just want to know I tried my best.

**Mission Summary**

Congratulations on completing Grief and Family Systems. As you have seen, the issues being faced by the human services professional in this situation range from spiritual to physical and financial. As you prepare your response to the courseroom discussion question, consider other examples from your own experience and try to identify the various issues that had to be addressed in order for the client or patient to have the best possible outcome.

**Summary Document Content**

**RECAP:**

In this mission, you observed the impact of conflict on people in a difficult situation and were able to see the role of a multidisciplinary approach on the part of the human services professional in working through that conflict. Sheldon's sister – 18 years younger than him – lives in California and has told the family that she cannot afford to come see him now, as he has been requesting. However, she has called Bruce and Shirley with increasingly intrusive ideas about how Sheldon's care should be handled. She has also said that she intends to speak at his funeral. Bruce is concerned, because his understanding is that the burial needs to take place within 24 hours of Sheldon's death. Susan tries to help navigate the conflict – particularly with Rabbi Zimmermann.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

As you have been learning in your courseroom readings and discussions, a collaborative approach to problem solving requires the use of three processes:

**•Synthesis**—the ability to bring together different points of view.

**•Analysis**—the ability to determine what is valuable information that needs to be reported for the problem solution.

**•Integration**—the ability to build insights into a plan of action.

The multidisciplinary approach is not limited to Human Services or medical professionals. Often the client or patient will be a key member of the team as well as family members and possibly even clergy, depending on the context and needs. Learning outcomes associated with this mission include being able to recognize methods for synthesizing and integrating information in order to generate a collaborative solution and synthesizing alternative approaches into a collaborative, multidisciplinary practice.

**RESOURCES**:

In the Working with Conflict Mission you had the opportunity to complete an interactive exercise in which you explored various approaches to resolving the conflict with Judith.

**Branching Interactive: Multidisciplinary Practice Activity**

**Multidisciplinary Practice Activity**

Even when employing a multidisciplinary approach, sometimes conflict is unavoidable. The situation with Judith is continuing to create tension and stress for Sheldon and his family. Judith has called Bruce and Shirley several times, telling them both how Sheldon's care should be handled. Additionally, Judith has indicated that she wants to speak at Sheldon's funeral but she continues to find reasons not to come see him while he is still alive. Bruce tells Susan that his father is deeply saddened by the thought of not saying goodbye to his sister and asks Susan to help find a solution to the problem.