

Editorial

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Time, timing and timeliness – of death, grief and support – are recurring themes in this edition.

In his review of David Clarke's biography of Cicely Saunders, Colin Murray Parkes alludes to a letter that Cicely had sent him in 1965, indicating her interest in exploring how relatives could be helped at an earlier stage, as well as after the death. Her concern to broaden and bring forward support has been lived out in the development of palliative care, the World Health Organisation definition of which sees the family as the unit of care.

While research studies have often explored bereaved people's views of the 'goodness' of a death, including its timeliness, participants have largely been used as proxies to report on the patient's experience. It is only more recently that attention has been paid to the impact that a good (or bad) death can have on bereaved people's own experiences and outcomes. Wakenshaw and Sillicence's article is an important addition to this body of work, highlighting how bereaved people's memories of an absence of physical and emotional distress can influence their grief. They acknowledge that it is the timing of death where the needs of the dying person and that of the bereaved person may diverge: a swift death may be what we hope for ourselves, but we would rather have time to say goodbye and prepare in some way when someone we love is dying.

The subjective experience of sudden death, and its impact on grief, is explored by Krychiw, James and Ward-Ciesielski. Not only do they compare the impact of deaths of objectively different predictability (determined by the cause of death), but also the impact of deaths which were subjectively suspected or anticipated versus those that were unexpected. Their findings warrant further exploration with larger samples on the extent to which expectedness of death among those who were bereaved suddenly is related to differential grief responses.

Krychiw, James and Ward-Ciesielski's study participants had been bereaved within the last five years, with an average of two years since the death. By contrast, the median time since bereavement in Bussolari et al.'s study of owners' views of the use of euthanasia with their companion animals was only eight days prior to taking part in their survey. It would be interesting to understand more about how the expression of guilt among a minority of owners abates or worsens over time.

There are specific times when it is important to explore the very early experiences of bereavement. Valentine's initial exploration of student bereavement support practices at a UK university revealed the difficulties inherent in students applying for 'individual mitigating circumstances'

temporarily affecting their academic performance to be taken into account when marks are finalised for assessments. These must be applied for within 72 hours of the bereavement, which for students who are shocked, travelling home (including overseas) or organising a funeral, is a very short time frame. For students whose bereavement affects them further down the line, it would be difficult to demonstrate the necessary temporary effect on academic performance. She makes practical suggestions as a starting point for how universities could create environments 'enabling students to grow through their bereavement'.

Valentine draws on the literature on late adolescence to suggest that bereavement may be particularly challenging to students, who are at a point of transition both developmentally and often geographically, living away from family for the first time. This developmental perspective on children and young people's grief is elaborated in some of the studies included in Davidson's round-up of research on sibling bereavement. In families where a child has a life-limiting or life-threatening illness, the disease progresses in parallel with the children and their siblings' own development, and longitudinal studies help to identify how roles, responsibilities and hopes change over time. She identifies how siblings grieve 'carrying the double burden of their own and their parents' grief'.

Many of the themes identified in these studies were explored in creative ways in the interactive exhibition *Remembering Baby*, described here by Reed, Whitby and Ellis. The physical exhibition, including art works by parents and siblings, was accompanied by a series of workshops but also opportunities for bereaved family members to leave a memory of their baby at the exhibition 'and to take something away with them to represent the potential for new life'.

The two themes (or Dual Process) of memorialising and restoring are given structure by the 'skeleton', 'muscle' and 'skin' of Cathy Phelan Watkins' year-long journey of grief and creation. *On a white horse* is reviewed here by Rolls. This year looks back to the relationship with her husband that preceded his death, made concrete by 23 Valentine cards, and forward as these days feel to be both 'an ending and a beginning'.

Her words are a helpful reminder that participants in the studies reported in this edition took part at a particular point (or points) in time. They shared their story of bereavement then because they were given an opportunity to do so, at that particular moment. We learn much from these encounters, but their stories of loss and rebuilding continue to unfold over time, long after the survey has closed, the interview has finished and the paper has been submitted. ■