

ABSTRACTS

Matching bereavement services to level of need

Walsh-Burke K. *The Hospice Journal* 2000; 15(1): 77-86

The establishment of hospices in the USA has resulted in an increase in bereavement services available to clients experiencing loss, since these resources are an integral part of hospice care. Most hospices are staffed to provide services such as follow-up contacts and bereavement groups. However, few are able to provide more intensive help in the form of grief therapy and psychotherapy. This article discusses the importance of assessment for complicated grief to ensure that appropriate services are offered to those at risk, and proposes a method of assessing risk and for matching service to the level of need.

Dismantling the boundaries between life and death

Howarth G. *Mortality* 2000; 5(2): 127-38

This article explores some of the ways in which the conceptual boundaries between the living and the dead - once

assumed to be as stark and solid as the walls around an asylum or prison - are becoming blurred and breaking down. The writer argues that the continuing relationships between bereaved people and their dead relatives and friends have been marginalised by modern practices. She discusses some of the mechanisms used by survivors to maintain their bonds with the dead, such as talking about them, anniversaries, self-help groups and the construction of biographies. The dying may also find ways of 'reconstituting' themselves after death, by making home videos, for instance, or by writing letters to be read after they have died.

Effects of a program of intervention on parental distress following infant death

Murray JA, Terry DJ, Vance JC, Battistutta D, Connolly Y. *Death Studies* 2000; 24(4): 275-305

A longitudinal study of 144 parents was carried out in the area of Brisbane, Australia, to evaluate the effectiveness of a programme of intervention in relieving the distress of parents affected by infant death. Participants were assessed in terms of their psychiatric disturbance, depression, anxiety, physical symptoms,

dyadic adjustment in the parents' relationship and coping strategies. They were divided into an experimental group, who were offered a programme involving the use of specially designed resources and contact with a trained grief worker, and a control group who were given routine community care. It was found that the intervention was effective in reducing the distress of parents, particularly those assessed as being at high risk of developing mourning difficulties.

This article is extremely dense, with many statistics, but the project was worked out with meticulous care, and for those contemplating a comparable programme it may well offer useful guidelines.

Using the Solution Focused Brief Therapy model with bereavement groups in rural communities: resiliency at its best

Gray SW, Zide MR, Wilker H. *The Hospice Journal* 2000; 15(3): 13-30

This article describes how the Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) model, which has been developed during the last 15 years and successfully adapted to different problem areas, can be used to help bereavement groups in a rural

setting. SFBT involves a focus on strengths, resources and mutual aid rather than on problems, deficiencies and pathology. It provides the structure for group members to begin working through their grief issues. The authors provide examples of techniques useful for laying the foundations of bereavement group work in rural communities.

The presence of the dead: an empirical study

Bennett G, Bennett KM. *Mortality* 2000; 5(2): 139-157

It is very common for bereaved people to feel that they are still in touch with their dead spouse. A post-bereavement experience that encapsulates this conviction is the sense of the dead person's presence - a phenomenon that in the past 50 years has become well documented in medical, counselling and psychological literature. This article, based on two empirical studies undertaken roughly 15 years apart, challenges some of the assumptions found in this literature, such as the claim that these experiences are illusory. The authors argue, on the other hand, that the phenomenon can be seen as 'real' and 'natural', evidence of the possibility of continuing links with the dead. **BK**

Sheila Hodges and John Bush

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