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EDITORIAL

Dora Black

Readers may conclude that the two research papers we publish in this issue raise more questions than they answer. However, both are worth studying and practitioners should emerge from their reading with a better understanding of not only the complexity of human behaviour, but also the process of research and how it can pose important questions and attempt to answer them.

The Utrecht University team headed by Wolfgang Stroebe always asks those questions which challenge the foundations of our work, and rightly so. Kissane's paper draws attention to the needs of the family and how palliative care and bereavement services with limited resources can operate a 'triage' system to focus their preventive efforts towards families at relatively greater risk. This paper focuses on adult families. Black and Urbanowitz* were able to show in 1987 the benefits to bereaved children of a family therapy approach, at least in the short term, and this research needs replication.

Siri and Michelle Persaud's paper describes a service for an often forgotten group of bereaved people – those with learning disabilities. The members of this group were attending a day centre where staff had felt at a loss as to how to explain to them about the death of a close relative. Children from the age of about five

can understand the principal components of the concept of death – ideas of irreversibility, non-functionality (dead people cannot move, breathe, eat, see, hear, feel) and universality – but like the adults with the mental age of children described here, they are often not given the information they need to understand their loss and begin to mourn. Many of the indi-

viduals had not been given the opportunity to see their dead relative's body, nor to take part in the funeral ritual, both of which aid understanding. The authors are to be congratulated for their initiative which we hope will inspire others.

The World Health Organization (WHO) are preparing the second edition of their *Guide to Mental Health for Primary Carers (UK)*, which goes to every general practitioner in this country and is a practical handbook of great value. This latest edition is to have a new section focusing on mental health issues relating to children and adolescents. A feature of the handbook is the guide to resources available on the internet and we will be publishing some useful internet addresses in a future issue. In the meantime the first edition of the guide is available on the internet at www.rsmppress.co.uk/bkwho.htm

*See 'The family and childhood bereavement – an overview' in the Summer 2002 issue of *Bereavement Care*.