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Cover: *Resurrection: Re-Union*  
1945 by Stanley Spencer (detail)

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## EDITORIAL

David Trickey

This issue we introduce readers to a new member of the editorial board, Dr Marilyn Relf. Marilyn is head of education at Sir Michael Sobell House, Oxford, UK – the WHO Collaborative Centre for Palliative Care – where her work has focused on developing and researching bereavement services. She founded the UK Bereavement Research Forum and is a member of the International Working Group on Death, Dying and Bereavement (IWG). We are very much looking forward to benefiting from her expertise and experience.

Since our last issue there have been a particularly high number of tragic events resulting in huge death tolls: hurricanes, floods, bombs, military occupations and earthquakes. At an individual level, the families with which I work sometimes become more united after a bereavement, strengthening their bonds and finding new depths to their relationships. For others, relationships become fractious, deep divisions develop and they may not stay together (Oliver<sup>1</sup> reviews the research on the impact of a child's death on marital relationships). After the suicide bomb attacks on London Transport this July, I was struck by how there appeared to be a similar mix of reactions amongst the UK public and in the media. Some newspaper articles denounced sections of our community as inherently violent and their members as potential killers, based on isolated recent events and a few ancient ones. Other articles and letters celebrated the UK's multiculturalism and the fact that it has always welcomed people, regardless of how they think and what they believe.

Violent death can undermine our world view, necessitating some form of 'recalibration'. In trying to make sense of such events, and an environment that suddenly appears more dangerous, it is understandable that some people looked for something or someone to blame. If they could work out who did it and why, maybe they could convince themselves that the world is not quite so scary – but at what price? Rather than allowing the events of 7<sup>th</sup> July to drive wedges between us, we should be looking for ways to strengthen our bonds and relationships. Some of you will be aware of the IWG's work looking at how violent death may lead to more violence and ways in which this cycle can be broken<sup>2</sup>. This model can be applied at the level of families or nations.

At the International Conference on Grief and Bereavement in Contemporary Society, several papers addressed some of the big questions raised by tragic events. It was an inspiring, unique opportunity for sharing ideas and learning from each other. See p56 for a report of the proceedings.

- 1 Oliver LE. Effects of a child's death on the marital relationship: a review. *Omega* 1999; 39(3): 197-227.
2. International Work Group on Death, Dying and Bereavement. Breaking cycles of violence. *Death Studies* 2005; 29(7), 585-600.

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Cruse Bereavement Care  
126 Sheen Road  
Richmond, Surrey TW9 1UR, UK

Telephone: +44 [0] 20 8939 9530

Fax: +44 [0] 20 8940 7638

Email:

info@crusebereavementcare.org.uk

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