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**Cover:** The professionals responsible for producing public reports about the dead work in a very different way to bereavement supporters, and yet their narratives may have a great influence on those who mourn.

## LIVING WITH THE DEAD

'I love you until death us do part and then we shall be together for ever and ever.' Dylan Thomas, in *Under Milk Wood*, points up the paradox of death. Where do the dead belong?

Those who provide support for bereaved people are aware of the dead; sitting silently in the corner of our consulting room, intruding into our conversations with the living or appearing to them in the night. We are familiar with the importance of continuing bonds, but it is not easy to find the right words to express the continued presence of the non-existent. Faced with this paradox, it is not surprising that some bereaved people give up hope. Indeed the sadness of loss is often a precursor of clinical depression.

The funeral is an important opportunity, and challenge, where the living can meet the dead, to reassure them of their continued value, to make promises and, perhaps, to bid them farewell. Traditional rituals are designed to ease this passage, but many people do not find them helpful and for others they are a nightmarish ordeal. In this edition of *Bereavement Care* Anne Barber looks at the ways in which those who lack faith in traditional rituals can construct their own and Amanda Aitken reviews websites on alternative funerals.

Funeral directors are mediators between the dead and the living, but they are not the only ones to take this role and Tony Walter, in a groundbreaking paper, explores the several ways in which professionals bridge the gap between the living and the dead; he calls this 'mediator deathwork'.

But what of those who, for whatever reason, are unable to find a new narrative, who cannot be reconciled? Too often, feelings of persisting helplessness and hopelessness trigger the condition that doctors and psychologists call 'clinical depression'. Are they the only ones who can help people with this condition or is there evidence that volunteers and others, can be of use? Tirril Harris reviews the evidence and comes up with conclusions that may challenge both the professionals and the volunteers to rethink our approaches to the problem of depression.

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