

Editorial

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Welcome to the summer edition of *Bereavement Care*. We have introduced two new sections to the journal in this issue: Spotlight on Practice, and First Person. In Spotlight on Practice, music therapist Bob Heath describes his use of music and song to work with bereaved people. In First Person, Ruth Worgan asks the question: 'How is a divorced wife meant to feel when her ex-husband dies?' and describes her own experience.

Personal accounts and the reporting of individual cases can be sources of inspiration and encouragement. Our Bereavement in the Arts series includes an illuminating discussion of the writer Joan Didion's autobiographical book *The Year of Magical Thinking*, which describes her response to the sudden deaths of first her husband, and then her daughter, within just a few months. However any first-person account must do more than simply describe the writer's grief; it must be able to stand back from the experience and look beyond it to sources of encouragement, support and recovery. When I pick up my daily newspaper or the latest issue of a medical journal, I often turn first to the Obituaries page. Frequently, I am filled with admiration that the person about whom I am reading managed to do so much in their life, and it is a very humbling experience. Sometimes, the story is of unfulfilled promise, or personal tragedy, or illness, but many are accounts of overcoming obstacles and making outstanding contributions in many different areas. We can be similarly inspired and motivated by people we meet, whether as patients/clients, colleagues, friends, or family.

We are always keen to include articles about different cultures and traditions. In this edition, we include a fascinating article by Christine Valentine on similarities and differences between UK and Japanese responses to death and loss. It is also timely to read Paul Cawkill's article on the casualty notification system and the bereavement support provided by the UK armed forces to the families of service personnel who die in combat. The article serves to remind us of the ongoing risks to which servicemen and women are placed and the worries and anxiety that their families

face, and that war and conflict are ongoing sources of trauma and bereavement even when they occur many miles away. There is also a very helpful article by Joann O'Leary, who discusses pregnancy following perinatal loss and the possible psychological impact on any subsequent pregnancy and the parent-child relationship.

Well-conducted research is fundamental to the delivery of timely, accessible and acceptable bereavement care, and this issue contains a number of excellent examples. Readers will find particularly useful and thought-provoking Margaret Stroebe's review of the research literature on vulnerability and resilience in the context of bereavement, which provides a thorough exploration of the issues and knowledge to date.

Unfortunately, the research base for many post-bereavement interventions is still poor. A recent article in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* (McDaid *et al*, 2008) reports a systematic review of data from controlled studies of interventions for people bereaved through suicide. The authors point out that, of the eight studies that met their criteria for inclusion, none of which were UK-based, all but one had serious methodological limitations. For example, the studies were generally small, and only two were truly randomised. The authors conclude that, while there is some evidence that certain interventions are helpful to people bereaved by suicide, further and stronger evidence is required to show which interventions are helpful and for whom. They also note that, with the paucity of robust and well-designed studies on post-bereavement interventions, it remains unclear whether interventions for those bereaved through suicide need to be different from those provided to people bereaved in other ways.

We hope that the combination here of findings from research and personal accounts will both inform and inspire you in your work. ■

McDaid C, Trowman R, Golder S *et al* (2008). Interventions for people bereaved through suicide: systematic review. *British Journal of Psychiatry* 193 438-443.