

Editorial

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It is a pleasure to introduce you to the winter 2009 edition of *Bereavement Care*. In the previous edition we introduced two new sections: First Person and Spotlight on Practice. In this edition, the First Person article is a moving, uplifting and informing account of the 'unexpected gifts' that Abigail Fuller received following the death of her daughter Scout at the age of eight, from cancer. There is, she writes, nothing worse than losing a child, but from this great loss have come some hard-learned but much-valued lessons about the preciousness of life.

Spotlight on Practice is an opportunity to share examples of innovative and inventive practice and in this issue Kathy Moore describes her bereavement and pre-bereavement work with children, young people and families, and the role played in this work by her dog, Do-Good. I was recently running a group for young people with cancer and I asked them to come up with a list of things that made having cancer a bit less bad. One of the young people suggested that having a dog made a huge difference – and everyone else in the group agreed enthusiastically. I asked what it was about having a dog that made such a big difference, and I was told very clearly by the young people that you can speak to a dog whenever you want to and on your terms, that a dog never interrupts and that a dog always keeps your secrets. I had to ask myself how many of those things are true of psychologists.

Most people involved in bereavement work will be aware of the ongoing debate about the research evidence for the effectiveness of bereavement support. Does bereavement support actually help people, or could it make things worse? In this particular debate science and practice have collided, and not always in a helpful way. Some people find the research particularly inaccessible or incomprehensible, and have therefore stopped following the debate very closely. This is a shame. We should be actively seeking to find out if what we do works.

If it does work, let's work out what it is that works and do more of it. If it does not work, then let's do something different. Dale Larson and William Hoyt's excellent article in this issue presents a counter-argument to the proposition that bereavement interventions may actually make people worse, and postulate some interesting ideas about why such a view may have gained favour.

Other articles in this issue address the particular needs of certain groups of bereaved people and demonstrate how research can be usefully translated into improved services and more sensitive practice. Kate Bennett reports some of the findings from her research into gender differences in the formal support provided to older widowed people. The men in this research tended to receive more formal support than the women and, interestingly, this was contrary to the findings in previous research but entirely in line with the beliefs of the women interviewees. The article ends with a fascinating discussion of the possible explanations for this.

Kathrin Boerner and Richard Schulz's article is an equally fascinating exploration of the impact of caring for someone before they die on the bereaved person's reaction to the death. The literature shows that, in many cases, caregivers experience what we call 'complicated grief' and the article usefully suggests ways in which such caregivers can be better supported both before and after the death.

In addition, we have our usual Webwatch, Abstracts and book reviews sections, which we hope will signpost you to issues and publications that you may not otherwise have encountered. And, finally, our cover story is this issue's Bereavement in the Arts article – a glowing description of the paintings from the tomb-chapel of Nebamun (who died in the 1300s BC), now carefully restored and once more on display in the British Museum in London, and what they tell us about the Ancient Egyptians' views of living with the dead. ■