

Editorial

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As a sociologist, I find the array of articles in this issue of Bereavement Care particularly interesting. The breadth of discussion, considered as a whole, highlights for me how far (some) things have changed since the late twentieth century in the UK particularly, but also how far individual bereavement experiences are always also shaped within particular cultural, historical, institutional, and local contexts. And, while the historical perspective suggests that responses to bereavement have moved a long way towards more open expression in some contexts, the contemporary articles here suggest also the persistence of social expectations that make such expression difficult, and lead individuals to value particularly the opportunity to share their personal experiences with others in similar circumstances.

Hall *et al* start us off with their discussion of bereavement in the workplace. This important topic does not generally receive the attention it requires, so the insights provided into human resource policies and experiences are very welcome. Drawing on interviews with bereaved employees, their small scale study highlights, however, the difficult balances that may be required between the provision and implementation of clear guidelines, and the flexibility that may be important to meet individual needs and circumstances. At the same time Hall *et al* point to the ways in which compassionate responses can enhance employees' commitment to an organisation.

In the article by Cawkill and Smith we are provided with insights into the experiences of those actually providing the care in complex organisational settings, through the particular role of the Army chaplain in the UK Armed Forces. The authors highlight how this setting raises particular issues for the (perennially difficult) job of clergy working with bereaved people. Army chaplains thus have additional reasons for experiencing strain, post-traumatic stress disorder, and burnout. The particular contexts of military bereavements also carry some potential pluses, however, with the close relationships that generally develop in particular military units, as well as specific support arrangements available in their army role.

Our focus then widens to a broad historical sweep in Jalland's article on changes in bereavement care across the twentieth century in England, although, importantly, her article also draws attention to uneven processes of change, and variabilities associated with regional and class differences. At the same time, the major significance of two world wars for customs of grief and mourning, is also very apparent. The central message from wartime governments, was to conceal grief through a stoical appearance, and

'carry on'. Jalland argues that this culture of silence and avoidance hit women particularly hard, cutting sharply across earlier expectations for women to grieve more expressively, but the new culture of silence continued for at least two decades past the end of the 1939-45 war. The culture started to change, however, by the 1960s, when Cruse Bereavement Care was established and expanding. At the same time, Jalland offers us important insights into the ways in which the culture of silence often persisted, with uneven and variable views of appropriate ways to grieve.

The following two articles both then turn our attention to more contemporary experiences of personal grief amongst young people, although there are threads here which suggest that cultures of silence and avoidance still persist to the present day. And Chowns' discussion also provides a sense of historical context, in terms of changes in the positioning of children, and ideas of childhood, in ways that help to shape their experiences of loss. The young people facing the death of a parent, whose voices and views were articulated together through the making of a DVD, convey strong desires for greater open-ness (properly supported) about the circumstances and treatment of their parents' illnesses, and for reciprocity through independence and responsibility in caring relationships with their parents.

Some of these themes resonate strongly with the final article, by Kammin and Tilley, including young people's desire to be given full information about their families' situations. These authors offer us insights into innovative and inter-disciplinary work with young people, seeking to facilitate new forms of expression for their grief through making music together. The overall tenor of this piece represents quite a stark contrast to the culture of silence described by Jalland, in which any shared expressions of grief might be considered impossible.

By contrast, Wadey's Spotlight on Practice brings us back to some of the practicalities of dealing with bereavement, in her thorough account of 'the bureaucracy of bereavement'. Rather than seeing such bureaucratic requirements as an unwelcome imposition on bereaved families, Wadey suggests they may be seen to hold positive meanings once their purpose is explicated. So, alongside her practical and helpful discussion, she also develops particular themes through which to make sense of the otherwise apparently meaningless bureaucracy of death.

And, finally, Regan's discussion of the form and role of elegy, again provides food for thought about the search for meaning, and the forms through which meaning may be found, both personal and public, in the face of bereavement. ■