# Editorial

**Orla Keegan**

Poetry, metaphor, linguistics… our grief is mediated through words and expressed through speech. This has long been recognised: Shakespeare's lines from Macbeth: 'Give sorrow words; the grief, that does not speak, whispers the o'er-fraught heart, and bids it break,' effectively prescribe expression to Macduff with a sense of urgency.

This issue of *Bereavement Care* takes pause to look at some of the constructing that underpins our language of grief experience, and also the language of support in bereavement. Evolving language and the implication of assuming shared meanings was previously addressed in this journal by Parkes (2007) under the title 'Dangerous Words'. In this issue, the articles hinge on options for experimenting with forms (simple, poetic and metaphorical) in order to share meaning and shape support.

Our first person article by Thomas Harding focuses on the aftermath of the sudden death of his son, Kadian. We see Harding 'obsessed by words'. He lays many of them out on these pages describing his consultation with a thearpist (acquiring a professional term 'posttraumatic stress' to match his experience); discussions with his wife which bring unexpected gifts (her 'words are like salve to my soul'); and his searches through self-help and professional sources.

In the introductory paragraph of Davies' Spotlight on Practice paper we hear about the discussions, commentaries, conversation and stories collected to foreground dads' and men's grief; to understand and share it. The article allows us to 'listen in' to the men's conversations as they '*organise (our) own experiences*'. We note their separate status experienced together; the metaphor of a 'club' is used to emphasise the uninvited but welcome togetherness: '*it's like being a member of a club that I didn't really particularly want to join.*'

These fathers arrived at a similar point to Thomas Harding – searching for a word to reflect their status; '*a bereaved parent doesn't have a label – do they? You have a widow or…. but a bereaved dad – there is no label, we're just lost aren't we*'. Harding took this question further and he has indeed uncovered three words from different cultures, with nuanced meanings for mother, father and parental loss. It is fitting that his reflection which is both personal and erudite can be shared here in *Bereavement Care*.

Elsewhere, Carr's *Broader Horizons* article seeks to apply the lessons of linguistics to make the most of communication in the bereavement support encounter. Her discussion is supplemented by useful demonstrations of how to think about and explore terms and alternatives. 'Understandability' is a goal worth striving for.

Bowman and Macduff argue that a focus on metaphor can aid in this quest for 'understandability' and communication; metaphor '*provides a way of conveying something which is known at some level but cannot be expressed directly*'. Actively listening for metaphor, or probing for what an experience 'looks like' are ways of putting the person at the centre of a conversation; of ensuring a connection. The authors identify a practical direction for using metaphor in a supportive context. Our Bereavement in the Arts feature also looks at metaphor, in the form of poetry. June Hall and RV Bailey, editors of the recent anthology *The Book of Love and Loss*, discuss how poetry can give words and bring solace to the emotional experience of grieving.

Different situations are defined by different professional languages. The post-mortem can represent such a context and in some cases is defined by both medical and legal imperatives. Stephens and her colleagues looked at relatives' experience and unsurprisingly one theme related to communication. While interpersonal manner was not found problematic, it does appear that very little detailed information was exchanged, little use was made of printed material, and the challenge of eliciting and responding to relatives' needs for more (or less) information can be significant.

An important research-based contribution to this issue is Rumbold and Aoun's paper setting out a framework for describing bereavement need and appropriate supports on a population basis. Their survey was distributed directly to bereaved people by Australian funeral directors and using this data the authors set out patterns of grief from low risk to complicated, and further, note the types of supports bereaved people have accessed. The authors go on to argue that community is the appropriate focus for bereavement care for the majority of people and that such communities, families and structures often develop creative ways of supporting their members which should not be underestimated or undermined. On the contrary, the authors call for more work on mapping and understanding the range of 'assets' available to bereaved people. We may well consider that the impact of words (or silence), and means of cultivating a willingness to converse should form a part of this next investigation.

Over the years one woman has contributed many, many words to Bereavement Care. Denise Brady of St Christopher's Hospice has crafted the *Bereavement round-up* service for the journal – selecting and interpreting the most recent bereavement research for readers. The Summer issue was Denise's final contribution to this section, but we are delighted that she is joining the editorial board of *Bereavement Care*. In this issue we welcome Laura Rooney Ferris, Information and Library Manager of the Irish Hospice Foundation who will take on the *Bereavement round-up* mantle. ■

Parkes CM (2007). Dangerous words. *Bereavement Care* 26(2) 23–25.