REVIEWS



BEREAVEMENT COUNSELLING
Compiled by Catherine Dobson. 1987. £3.00.

Wessex Regional Library and Information Service, Regional Library Unit, Southampton General Hospital, Southampton SO9 4XY. Also available from The Study Centre Bookshop, St. Christopher's Hospice.

This recently published handbook covers many aspects of loss and bereavement and is much wider in scope than the title would suggest. The publication includes lists of useful organisations, literature for both professionals and the general reader, and a selection of audiovisual materials. It is a good representative bibliography and list of available resources, including some very recent material.

It is divided into three parts: details of relevant organisations and publications about support groups; list of books and journal articles with a useful commentary on each book; selection of audio cassettes, filmstrips and videos. The entries are described but not reviewed.

In the first part, a brief note about each organisation indicates its scope and the kind of facilities offered. Among the publications on support groups, are several referring to the establishment of volunteer bereavement counselling schemes, which would be of assistance to those wishing to start similar services.

The main part of the publication comprises the entries for books and journal articles, arranged by subject and within each category, alphabetically by the author's surname. Publishing details of each book are given in bold type, so that this information stands out clearly on the page.

Material on general aspects of loss and bereavement is listed at the beginning of the bibliography. Books for the general reader are followed by those suitable for professionals, each title having a brief description of content, and an indication of any special emphasis within the text. At the end of the section there is a list of journal articles suggested as background reading for professionals. This pattern of arrangement is maintained throughout the following sections on different aspects of bereavement and loss.

Loss in the early stages of life is covered, with material included on miscarriage, stillbirth, sudden infant death and the death of a child, for relatives, friends and professionals.

Loss at a later stage in the human life-cycle focuses mainly on the death of a partner, relative or friend, as might be expected. However, other types of loss which are sometimes overlooked but can be the cause of real grief to the person concerned, have also been covered in this publication. There are special sections on grief as the result of losing a body part or function, death of a pet, redundancy, unemployment and imprisonment.

Material on the effects of major disasters upon the survivors, comes under the heading 'Loss for a community' and multicultural attitudes to death and bereavement are covered in another section. Loss by suicide, grief and mentally handicapped people, and helping children to cope with death, all receive special attention. Lastly there are a few references on support for the carers.

The final part of the publication lists audiovisual material, alphabetically by title, giving an outline of the content and an indication of the audience for which each is intended. Many of the topics covered by the books and journal articles, are also presented in audiovisual format. Thirty items are listed, together with details of the suppliers, including telephone numbers.

This publication will be an invaluable resource to all involved in supporting those who have suffered loss or bereavement, whether they are working in a professional or voluntary capacity. There are also suggestions for the general reader, and materials which counsellors could consider recommending for bereaved people.

BARBARA GREENALL
Librarian, St. Christopher's Hospice

LETTER TO MY HUSBAND
Notes about mourning and recovery.

Jill Truman. London: Hodder & Stoughton. 1988. £5.95, hardback.

'Why has no one told me these things?' cried C. S. Lewis from the depths of his grief. And it is true that there is still relatively little written for the layman about the anguish and vagaries of bereavement and the gradual climb towards recovery.

Jill Truman's husband died suddenly after 20 years of marriage, leaving her with four children including a baby of ten months. Four months later she began to write him a series of letters in an old exercise book. It was her way of talking to him, of sharing her pain and longing, but also her news of herself and the children. The letters continued for almost a year and form the main part of the book. There is also a postscript written 12 years later in 1987.

Many bereaved people find an outlet in pouring out their feelings on paper. Usually the main value is that the act of writing can be therapeutic in enabling grief to be expressed. Occasionally, as in C. S. Lewis's *A Grief Observed*, what is written is of sufficient merit to stand as a book in its own right, to be read not only by the bereaved and those who try to help them but as an addition to the literature of human experience.

'Letter to my Husband' falls into this second category. Well-written and honest, it is not so much a diary as a series of love letters from which we learn not only about two individuals but also about the nature of love and loss. Here is the despair and anger bereavement ('I'm sick of being Mother Bloody Courage. I WANT YOU BACK'), and the physical pain and longing. Here is also the bewilderment, the questioning of the meaning of existence, interspersed with the ups and downs of daily life.

Here too is grief at the terrible loss of contact and of not knowing where her husband is now or what is happening to him; the sense of being in limbo; and the gradual discovery that she can cope and, bit by bit, come to terms with his death. The postscript, written from the perspective of several years later, offers a hope and calmness that balances the emotional turmoil of the letters.

Jill Truman did not find C. S. Lewis's *A Grief Observed* helpful. Some will not find this book helpful for grief is personal and everyone is different. But many men and women of this generation will find it valuable, including some whose lives have not yet been touched by the loss of a lover and partner.

PATRICIA SCOWEN

COPING WITH CANCER
by Rachael Clyne
Wellingborough, Northants: Thorsons. 1986. £4.99.

This is another of the Life Crisis series published by Thorsons. Dedicated to those with experience of cancer it is not only a very practical guide but is also full of heartening good sense.

One of the commonest diseases in our families—one in four of us gets cancer—it remains too much shrouded in fear. The time has come for far more open knowledge of how and why this disease attacks so many amongst us. Facing it with openness and determination we can approach the wholeness of health in a new way and learn patterns of living which may both cut the fatalities and, in many cases, assure bodily strength to fight it and recover.

I believe Rachael Clyne and her friends have done us a great service in producing this book with its clear explanations and recommendations for family and self-help. In clearing some of the medical mysteries she also puts forward a positive holistic approach which complements diagnosis and treatment. She tackles the patient's inner battle with diagnosis and shock to the point of positive thinking about the outcome. She tells us too where to go for help and even how to set up a Cancer Support Group.

If you have a friend or relative facing this big challenge in the health stakes, get this book and read it yourself too. You will be heartened and helped by it.

MARGARET TORRIE
Founder of Cruse

CARING FOR DYING PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT FAITHS
by Julia Neuberger. 1987. London: Austen Cornish Publishers with Lisa Sainsbury Foundation. £3.50.

This short book provides guidelines on the beliefs and customs of six major world faiths, including Christianity, paying particular attention to those aspects which affect the dying patient and his family. The information contained in it should enable nursing staff not only to be more sensitive to the spritual needs of patients but also to be more effective in meeting those needs, taking into account cultural and religious factors. In the final chapter emphasis is placed on always treating each patient as an individual, while retaining an awareness of their spiritual background in order to enhance total care. This book deals with a previously neglected subject and should prove to be most useful to all professionals involved in terminal care.

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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
Grief and Bereavement in Contemporary Society
12th-15th July, 1988
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre
London
For further details please turn to back page