without in any way rushing the bereaved through the process. Eventually the queue, which was gradually moved into warmth and shelter, was moving at the rate of one family every 7-10 minutes.

Competition

But there was another important and positive dynamic which was also assisted by the decision to direct counsellors and social workers to each family or family group.

It is an unfortunate fact, but one which has to be accepted, that competition creeps in between agencies. I have had clergy tell me that they were not happy at Cruse counsellors treading on what they see as 'their' patch for everyday bereavement counselling. (A letter which appeared in a national newspaper from a trained counsellor who claimed to be at Hillsborough that Saturday night, smacked of the same attitude towards volunteers.)

Those of us at Hillsborough on that Saturday night found that while there were tendencies early in the process for some agencies to huddle protectively around 'their' clients, the boundaries were lowered as the evening went on. Two decisions seemed to help in this process. One was that already mentioned, i.e. directing counsellors, clergy or social workers to accompany each group. The second was the authority and encouragement given by a senior police officer for another agency to organise the queue, and allocate helpers once the need was explained. In other words, the police officer used his authority to delegate responsible leadership. Thus communication was established between those who were bereaved and helpers from different agencies, between those escorting families through the process, and those responsible for the identification process inside the temporary mortuary.

This co-operation not only helped to improve the quality of care given during the immediate aftermath of the Hillsborough disaster, but has subsequently resulted in a joint project group for long-term follow up and planning.

It was these communication facilities which were missing at the Medico-Legal Centre the following days, causing frustration, anxiety and anger for the relatives, and a greater sense of ineptitude and frustration between helping agencies. That is not to say that families were not cared for, or that staff were in any way incompetent. But the lack of any specific directive to enable help to be given to the bereaved was self-evident, and had some unhappy side effects which could have been alleviated.

Conclusion

It is now recognised that a contributory factor towards a healthy grief for the bereaved is the quality of help they receive at the time of the death and immediately following.

There are times in life when appropriate help needs to be on hand whether it is requested or not, or even if people cannot foresee themselves as needing it.

For example:

- When a loved one is overtaken by sudden death
- When officialdom seems slow, strange and unsympathetic, and is perceived as unnecessarily slow and cumbersome
- When terms like 'post-mortem' are assumed to mean cutting up and disfigurement
- When crowds of people are in facilities designed for only a few at a time, and where groups of bereaved people are not only having to cope with their own grief, but with the noise and despair of those around them.
- When several different agencies are involved and the media are also competing for attention.

It does not seem to me to be appropriate in these situations to ask people if they want or need help. Such help needs to be available in such a way that agencies are not competing and are equally involved, since their needs too must be respected. Families do need escorting and protecting, and to be provided with as much or as little emotional and practical support as required. And those who are providing this service need to have access to those who do know what is happening, or who are in charge in the midst of what can seem to others a random, even chaotic process.

Such services need leadership which is well informed and able to work with all the agencies concerned, rather than a leadership vacuum in which people compete and are able to find out what is going on only by repeated and irritating demands on authority.

To convey to those who are suffering that the people in charge care sufficiently to be organised in such a way is a great comfort which can lower tension and reduce anger and anxiety.

A few years ago a family I know were involved in an accident on the M5 motorway. The wind caught their caravan, which swayed, hit the central reservation and overturned. The feature of the experience which they most appreciated was that the job of one of the police crews was to take the wife and children to a Motorway cafe and look after them until the husband/father could join them when the damaged vehicles had been cleared.

The very nature of disasters, whether large or small, means that the conditions in which they happen are unforeseen. Whether or not the outcome is a death, the experience for those caught up in it is emotional and traumatic. To assume that people will be able to make rational judgments in such conditions, and to leave them to themselves, is to reduce their ability to respond and make decisions and, consequently, to reduce their options and give them less choice.

FORTHCOMING COURSES AND CONFERENCES

Explaining Our Own Death Workshops. 22nd January, 1990; 19th February, 1990; 12th March, 1990. £16. Details from Christianne Heal, Tel. 01-435 5432. Also 31st March, 1990, The Mary Ward Centre, 42 Queens Square, London WC1N 3AQ. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. £12. (Tel. 01-831 7711).

National Association of Bereavement Services Working Conference and 1st AGM. 29th January, 1990. London (Regents College). Guest speakers, bookstall and 20 workshops on different aspects of grief and working with the bereaved. £35 with lunch, £25 without. For more information contact Jan Webster, c/o N.A.B.S., 68 Charlton Street, London NW1 1JR. Tel. 01-388 2153.

Third International Conference on Grief and Bereavement in Contemporary Society. 30th June-4th July, 1990. Sydney, Australia. Programme includes the following themes for each day: 1. Children and Loss; 2. Trauma and Loss; 3. Grieving in Various Cultures; 4. Ethical and Legal Issues relating to Life and Death. Enquiries to The Secretary, Third International Conference on Grief and Bereavement in Contemporary Society, Sydney, July, 1991, Conventions Department, P.O. Box 489, G.P.O., Sydney, New South Wales 2001, Australia.

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Correction

'Adolescents experiencing the death of a parent.' In the Summer 1989 issue of *Bereavement Care* on page 19, reference 16 (Parkes CM) should have read volume 281.