Bereavement Care

for all who help the bereaved

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Media awards for good writing to be launched for the Jubilee

CRUSE BEGINS A YEAR-LONG CELEBRATION of its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1984 with a series of national and regional events, most of them designed to concentrate the public's mind on the needs of bereaved people.

Cruse Week will be October 6-13 - a time when local and national appeals, radio 'phone-ins, newspaper articles, television spots and regional events for members and workers will be particularly featured.

Churches throughout the country will be invited to focus on bereavement during Cruse Week and it is hoped that at least one ecumenical service will be held in a cathedral, with an address to the congregation on the work of Cruse.

A special Cruse Jubilee Award is to be made during the year to the playwright, author, journalist or film or television producer who is considered to have made the most significant contribution to greater understanding of bereavement during the previous twelve months.

A panel of judges drawn from the medical, literary and communications fields is now being formed. Nominations for the award are to be invited from the entrants themselves or from others on their behalf, and will consist of material published or presented in the United Kingdom.

Several Jubilee publications are planned. They include a Commonplace Book on aspects of death and bereavement compiled by Agnes Whitaker, editor of the Cruse Chronicle.

There will also be a Cruse cookery book, for which members, workers, patrons and Friends of Cruse are invited to submit their favourite dish. It is hoped that the book will have chapters on regional dishes, and will not only be valued in kitchens throughout the country, but will also help Cruse to become a household name, by being around in the home long before the organisation's help is needed.

Another publication, Twenty-Five Happy Returns, will feature twenty-five people

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MENTAL HANDICAP — a new exploration of grief

AN EXPLORATION OF THE NEEDS OF THE mentally handicapped when they are bereaved will take place for the first time in Cruse with a workshop at the annual conference at Swanwick, Derbyshire, next month.

It will be led by Maureen Oswin, research officer with the Thomas Coram Unit, London University, Institute of Education.

Derek Nuttall, Cruse Director, explains: "We are not sure at at this stage whether our bereavement skills are needed by mentally handicapped people. We must investigate this whole area.

"It's possible that a greater understanding of what a mentally handicapped person feels after a major bereavement will actually highlight certain aspects of grief that are usually overshadowed."

Occasionally, Cruse counsellors and social groups are asked to advise members on how a mentally handicapped child should be brought to the realisation that his father or mother has died.

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Later this year, BEREAVEMENT CARE will begin a detailed series which will describe how different religious and cultural groups mourn and their attitudes to the bereaved. Here, DR. VEIRA BAILEY, M.R.C. Psych.,consultant child psychiatrist, West Middlesex Hospital, explores ways in which society can benefit by looking at the wide variety of customs and rituals used by different communities, ethnic groups and religions.

One of the most helpful aspects of the development of society today has been the sensitive, caring and pragmatic work done by Cruse in helping the bereaved manage the process of mourning. The general body of theory has developed by integrating ideas from a variety of sources such as psychoanalytic, psychiatric, sociological, anthropological and so on.

Looking at the practices of other religious and cultural groups provides an enlightening and creative stimulus to the development of our thinking and practice in helping the bereaved. What is fascinating is the way all cultures develop rituals and ritual specialists, although the customs may be very different or even contradictory, as in the reaction to cremation or burial in various cultures.

In this country the traditional Christian rituals of preparing the body for burial, the funeral procession, church service and burial were all family and community activities. With urbanisation the link between the community and the new Metropolitan cemeteries was broken and the cultural and community aspects of bereavement customs withered, especially in the towns.

As a society we need to look again at the wide variety of customs and rituals used by different communities, ethnic groups and religions. We need to do this, not only to increase our sensitivity to other people's customs, but also to redevelop socially recognised rituals and etiquette that are supportive.

Jewish customs have evolved and developed over the centuries as a continuous tradition and have particularly well worked out customs graduated to cope with the gradually diminishing intensity of grief.

Caring for close relatives of the bereaved by the community in the early stages of mourning is customary in many Middle Eastern and Far Eastern countries. This gives a clear injunction to the relatives that they are free to concentrate on the mourning and also provides care for the children.

Customs and death ceremonies are helpful not only to the bereaved but to society as a whole by providing a manageable rehearsal of attitudes, feelings and behaviour around death

The process of mourning, the elements of denial, protest, despair and readjustment have to be worked at and dealt with. Many religions and cultures help the bereaved accept the reality of death by customs around viewing the body or a stark confrontation with the reality of the disposal of the body by open cremation or burial.

Some inducement such as a meal or a party for the extended family and community to attend seems to be universal. Perhaps we should consider some of the rituals of some very primitive societies in permitting the release of anger and rage at the death. Would this reduce its displacement to family feuds or litigation which seems more common here?

Final ceremonies are important because they give permission for mourning to end and life to resume.

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from different age groups and walks of life, each of them describing some of their memories and conclusions after coming through the grieving experience

Discussions are to take place about involvement of Cruse patrons who are members of Parliament and the part they might play in projecting Cruse's role in the community. Production of a 15-minute film for use in publicity and fundraising has also been mooted.